

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



101 379

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

917.3 097
Keep Your Card in This Pocket

Books will be issued only on presentation of proper library cards.

Unless labeled otherwise, books may be retained for four weeks. Borrowers finding books marked, defaced or mutilated are expected to report same at library desk; otherwise the last borrower will be held responsible for all imperfections discovered.

The card holder is responsible for all books drawn on his card.

Penalty for over-due books 2c a day plus cost of notices.

Lost cards and change of residence must be reported promptly.



PUBLIC LIBRARY
Kansas City, Mo.

Keep Your Card in this Pocket

KANSAS CITY, MO. PUBLIC LIBRARY

0 0001 0158397 9

THE PERFECT FRIEND

HECTOR DUVAL

ADVENTURES OF ANTOINE

ROCKINGHAM DIAMOND

THE BATTLE OF LONDON

(the pen name of Hugh Addison)

ALONICA AND AFTER

C.O.'S CAMEOS

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION
COLLINSON OWEN

London

ERNEST BENN LIMITED

1929



FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1929
PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY THE
GARDEN CITY PRESS LTD.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THERE WOULD SEEM at first sight nothing more commonplace than another book about the United States. So many have already been written in England on the subject of what we call America. But though so much has been written about it very little information has been imparted thereby. Most English writers have a way of saying very little in many words whenever they deal with this subject. Some of them have indulged in clever and even delightful exhibitions of what may be called literary shadow-boxing. Even certain English heavyweights of literature—following the modern traditions of the British prize-ring—have displayed a great deal of verbal ringcraft without ever delivering anything in the nature of a punch. Some possible reasons for this attitude are suggested in the following pages.

In them a considerable amount is set down in frankness, but nothing in malice. America by now is surely big enough to take the rough with the smooth, to be told with some approach to truth how she really affects an English observer. Indeed, there are many Americans who are awaiting it; who are tired of an England, and baffled by an England, which as regards its comprehension of modern America rises no higher than the mentality of the average "movie fan." Things have been made too smooth for America. A little "roughage," as the dietetic experts call it, should be all to the good for her moral and spiritual digestion.

Socially, politically, and financially, America has become of immense importance to England. She influences us now in our daily lives to an immense extent; far more than does any other nation. But though England hears so much about America, she learns nothing. She knows everything about her façade of prosperity and magnificence. She realises little or nothing about the astonishing background to all this, in which crime, corruption, and politics are mixed up in a

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

fantastic manner which apparently the simple English mind is unable to understand.

It is not America's fault if England does not understand this sort of thing, because America herself discusses it with a frankness which is one of her most engaging and impressive traits. And England ought to understand, because without such knowledge she does not know what factors she is dealing with when engaged in, say, a political discussion, whether affecting naval matters or anything else. Just as, apparently, there was nobody to tell our statesmen that in matters of money France has the mentality of a lioness defending her whelps, so apparently nobody has ever pointed out to the gentle leaders of England that in American politics there are standards almost unimaginably different from our own.

Shortly before Mr. Ramsay MacDonald sailed on his famous trip to Washington I wrote, apropos the Shearer naval revelations: "If America is suspicious of anybody, it is of us. If we are unsuspicious of anybody, it is of America. Both of us in this exchange are more wrong than we are right." But though America cherishes certain illusions about us, we perhaps possess more regarding her.

America is to-day England's greatest subject of interest. We are America-conscious to an extraordinary degree—and remain ignorant of the subject to almost the same degree. The ideal of Anglo-American friendship is our chief political aim, and to secure it England has made every possible variety of concession since the war, mainly in the name of an American idealism of which we hear much but of whose practical application we see little. Despite a certain frankness in this book—perhaps because of it—there is nothing in it which does not aim at that ideal. It is more likely to be reached by facing certain facts, that tower as high as skyscrapers, than by pretending they have no place in America's social and political skyline.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
The Discovery	I
The City of Melodrama	12
Peace in Boston	20
The Twentieth Century Limited	27
Chicago	34
Society in St. Louis	44
"The Heart of America"	51
Going West	58
And so to San Francisco	64
The City of Romance	73
An Adventure in Real Estate	98
The Enchanted Hill	107
Nature's Biggest and Best	127
In Texas	133
A Louisiana Tragedy	141
Dixieland	172
Where Lincoln Died	178
The Murder in Room 349	186
Back to Metropolis	197
Good-bye to America	221
Some Conclusions	230
Envoi	280

THE DISCOVERY

IT WAS OSCAR WILDE, I think, who said that, though America had been discovered many times, the fact had always been hushed up.

Any such reticence has disappeared since his day. The world has now definitely heard about America—by which of course we mean the United States, which is a careless habit that will now never be cured. Here and there, in the newspapers of Europe, one quite often sees references to her, her institutions and her citizens. These things have a way of creeping into the news. Hollywood, for instance, and crime and big finance. However much she may wish it herself, America can no longer hide.

Yet despite a process of discovery which in latter years has become intensive, one cannot deny that it is a moment of considerable magnitude first to step on to the landing-stage at New York. At my own moment of discovery I had all the wonder of Columbus within me. In some ways I had the advantage of him. He had no idea of what was inside America. He had never heard of Mr. Babbitt, of the Ziegfeld Follies, of Mr. Volstead, whereas I was more or less familiar with the existence of these and many other phenomena.

It was still quite early in the morning when I made my own discovery. Say about nine-thirty. Our liner had anchored overnight, with twinkling lights far to right and left of us to show that we were really nearly there. As a rule the modern discoverer of America refuses to take the sea in anything less than a 60,000 ton ship. Ours was a modest cockleshell of some 21,000 tons, and what is more—or less—she had taken ten days to do the crossing from London

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

River. She had no swimming bath on board, and the most careful search failed to discover anything in the nature of a cardsharper. There was nobody of appalling wealth, and not a single Big Business Man from the Middle West, holding down the smoke-room in the approved fashion.

In some ways, then, a rather disappointing crossing. On the other hand, there were certain advantages. Our passenger list, almost entirely American, was composed of very nice people ; what in England we should call upper-middle-class. They were almost all returning from long holiday tours in Europe. The American girl was there in considerable numbers ; some of them quite notable specimens of what many American writers prefer to call pulchritude. In short, very pretty girls. They had been away for three months, six months, a year ! When these Americans take holidays they refuse to think of week-ends.

Here is a sample deck-chair conversation, selected at random from some hundreds :

Myself : How did you enjoy your trip to Europe ?

Miss America : Very much.

Myself : Have you been away long ?

Miss A. : We left New York in the middle of May.

Myself : Really. And where did you go to in Europe ?

Miss A. : Well, first we went to Paris for a month. Then we went on to Florence, Rome, and the Lido. Then we had a month in the Bavarian Alps, did Vienna on the way back, and finished up with six weeks in London and England. . . .

After hearing of a modest programme like this one can only think " Gee ! " The rout is completed when one's companion of the moment remarks casually that this is her fourth time " over." Even engaging young Misses of twelve or fourteen are liable to say this. These Americans—these happy few who know their Europe—have made Continental travel look suburban. They rob one even of the thrill of being in mid-Atlantic. And year after year they cross,

THE DISCOVERY

thousands of them, shipload after shipload. . . . Despite them there are very many millions of Americans who have never discovered Europe, and never will.

Ever fresh relays of them, coming over for the great adventure. . . . Going to Europe! On his way for the first time to America the Englishman does not realise what that means. Returning from America he does—knows just what a delectable land Europe is, how full of marvels, of magic, of romance. But all that can be left till later, in its proper time.

Never was there such a pedestrian ship as this. Half the passengers, it is true, including some of the prettiest girls, are content to recline in their deck-chairs. But there are others, many others, who are determined to cross the Atlantic on foot, who all morning, all afternoon, and much of the evening, circle the promenade deck as though they were engaged in one of those endurance competitions for which the United States are famous.

Round and round—round and round. They are so earnest—they never relax, they might be doing it as a religion. As one watches them day after day a certain amusement grows into irritation. Can't they keep still?

There is the white-haired, pink-faced American, with the pretty and beautifully plump little woman from New York. He, they say, has a place in Sussex, and lives there. She, once rich, now runs a beauty parlour in New York—and is probably richer. Hour by hour they tramp the deck, unflagging, unchanging. Eleven times to the mile, or whatever it is. . . . Here they come. . . . Now round to star-board. . . . Here they come again!

But most wonderful of all is the quiet little family party, all small of stature, all dark of complexion, all dressed in the darkest possible clothes. Two sisters, two brothers, all of them within middle age. What are they—Spanish, Jewish,

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

what? Anyhow, American. The elder brother wears a telephone attachment and occasionally uses this for conversation as he walks. Steadily this compact family group plods the deck. . . . Hundreds and hundreds of miles they cover.

And an unreasoning irritation grows up within me as I watch them, day after day. Why can't they stop? As they pass I try not to glare. . . . Why the devil can't they stop?

Late in the voyage I accidentally meet the younger of the two brothers. He is very agreeable and eager in conversation, very glad to meet people from "the other side." His name is McCook, not Lopez or anything else. He laughs engagingly. "Everybody takes us for Jews. We're all so dark." Before America came into the war he worked like a slave, at meetings all up and down the Middle West, trying to bring her in. When she came in he did a lot in training camps, and then crossed the seas with his own battalion. He just missed the front line, but he had a brother who was luckier—anyhow he was wounded. This other brother, who is now with him on board, is a surgeon. He lost his hearing in the Spanish-American war. Applying to be a surgeon in the Great War he was told that his deafness barred him. He replied that a deaf surgeon might be just as good as any other—and so into it he went, and did the usual grim work in the casualty clearing stations.

I have only been in New York a few days when I pick up the *Sun* and read:

"Another Fighting McCook. Award by the War Department of a Distinguished Service Cross to Supreme Court Justice Philip McCook is proper recognition of a gallant soldier. The citation accompanying the award attests that at Lion-devant-Dun on November 6, 1918, near the end of the Argonne-Meuse offensive, Major McCook went "far beyond the call of duty" in carrying out the mission assigned to him. Though severely wounded in performing that duty, he refused to have his

THE DISCOVERY

wounds dressed until he had dictated valuable information to be sent to the brigade commander.

"Justice McCook might explain his gallantry by saying that it is a family habit. He is of the blood of the 'fighting McCooks.' His father, the Rev. John James McCook, was one of five brothers who served in the Union army. His grandfather, John McCook, was a volunteer surgeon in the Union army. His uncle, Roderick McCook, a Union naval officer, had the distinction of receiving the surrender of a regiment of Confederate infantry. Such was the tribe of John.

"The tribe of Daniel was as famous and as fighting. At its head stood Daniel McCook, Justice McCook's great-uncle, who volunteered at the start of the civil war, though he was 63 years old, and who fell two years later from bullets fired by one of Morgan's raiders. Daniel and his wife, Martha Latimer McCook, sent ten sons into the Union army. Five of them attained general rank. Three of them fell in battle. It was Colonel Daniel McCook, Sherman's law partner in Leavenworth, who halted his Ohio men before the Confederate works at Kenesaw Mountain and read from Macaulay the lines :

" ' And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds ? '

"In the assault that followed Colonel Daniel himself fell, mortally wounded. . . ."

All of which showed one that it is not wise to judge steamer passengers too quickly, even if they are fond of walking.

Even a ten-day voyage ends. There came the solemn moment of the last cocktail. Seven o'clock of a Sunday evening, the smoke-room full of Paris frocks. For ten days we had made the most of what remains of British liberty. We had drunk wine at dinner at six shillings a bottle which in America only selected millionaires could hope to sip.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Day by day our smoke-room chits had grown in number. Now the moment of reckoning had come. We had to pay and depart. "Time, gentlemen, please!"—almost. Ten last days of freedom and now months and months of dryness ahead. . . . Apparently the subject simply cannot be ignored, whether you are merely approaching America or really in it.

Five minutes to go. A solemn moment, yet, as is so often the way with solemn moments, electrified by a sort of desperate gaiety. Tongues are loosened. Hearts are opened. The last timidities of ten days' acquaintance are swept away with a rush. British reserve is finally vanquished by American heartiness. I am invited to visit Kentucky, Alabama, New Haven, Los Angeles, and Washington. The steward hovers round, his eyes, so to speak, on his stop watch. There comes the stupefying moment when this man, compounded during ten days of urbanity and charm, absolutely refuses to serve another drink. The dark shadow of New York is upon us. We go down to a dinner that is wineless, except for those who have had the foresight to provide a bottle in advance.

I share in such a bottle—Liebfraumilch. Six shillings when it was ordered. Now as we sip it, soberly, regretfully, as might some great prince paying homage to his last bottle of Tokay, it is worth six pounds. To-morrow night it will be worth Heaven knows what.

It had long been a serious whimsy of mine that I would refuse to believe in the existence of America until I had seen the Statue of Liberty with my own eyes. And I almost missed it. A glorious morning of autumn sun, but with mist in the sunshine. As we sailed in, reporters and cameramen quite politely busy, there suddenly appeared, away to port, the majestic emblem of Liberty, faintly visible in a translucent shroud of mist, coppery green in colour,

THE DISCOVERY

ethereal, dreamlike, despite her size. A brief but most artistic moment. A moment later and she was gone. It was a narrow escape for America.

Then mountains and peaks rising out of mist. Eager voices indicating this peak and that. The famous Skyline. Not the Jungfrau, but the Woolworth Building. Not the Eiger, but the Equitable. Just as exciting, in its way. And no doubt just as beautiful, with or without mist, at any rate for the first time of seeing. In any case a tremendous preparation for a discoverer who is just about to land.

As the tugs, each with its widespread golden eagle, butt us gently into place, I feel that this is the rise of the curtain on a great personal drama. A vast new country to be explored, full of many things : a hundred million people to be seen ; people who in many ways must be considered as foreigners, yet who, by some magic, speak the same language as my own, so that nothing will be hidden. A country familiar by a lifetime of reading, of photographs, of the movies, yet utterly unknown. America with all its tumbling crowd of preconceived impressions, from the youthful days of Buffalo Bill worship, down through the years to the era of President Wilson and so to the present day of Big Bill Thompson, Lindberg, Mayor Walker, sawn-off shotguns, bootleggers and the rest. A big moment for me, despite those travelling Americans who trot up and down Europe with no more concern than we travel the Home Counties. What will it all be like ?

And here *is* America at last. I am talking to a customs officer in the familiar blue uniform and peaked cap. I wonder whether he is armed, but decide that his is probably regarded as a fairly peaceful occupation. He is quite a nice customs officer, even when he asks me to open my trunk. It is an American trunk, of which I am very proud. But it is packed so tightly that when one releases the last shackle it springs open, briskly as a guardsman, to attention. Boots and boot-

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

trees shoot out. I can't close it again. A hellish moment. A fat porter, of Near Eastern complexion and speaking vague English, helps me. Between us we throttle it. Then a taxi and—whizz!—we are in New York.

That first moment was nearly the last. How the bigger car escaped cutting us in two will probably never be known. The taxi's four-wheel brakes screech alarmingly. (I was to learn soon that all New York's taxis do that). Onwards! We hit a large hole in a cobbled street and I bounce, terrified. (I was to learn to my surprise that there are lots of holes in New York streets). We pass through mean thoroughfares, in which there are coloured men and other strange people. I did not quite expect such mean streets in wonderful New York. A wild ride over, we draw up at an immense hotel.

This is not a hotel but a town, a commercial town. There are more than two thousand bedrooms, and apparently every guest has ten visitors waiting below. The main entrance hall is like a fair. Conventions are proceeding, and well-dressed business men are here from all over America. They wear badges, bearing their names. Thus, if I had wished, I could have gone at once to one of them and said, "Mr. Earl Petersen, I'm glad to meet you." Instead I am shot up twelve floors from the superheated hall to a superheated bedroom. I open a window, very gingerly, and find that I am perched half-way up a brick cliff twenty-four stories high. There is a skyscraper near, just being finished off, some forty stories high. I feel like a seagull, with none of its confidence.

What follows is fantastic. Down in the superheated hall a friend plucks me from the multitude. We plunge into the roaring subway, which is all and more that one has ever heard about it. We rise to the surface and join a river of tiny people flowing along at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. This is Wall Street. The buildings are colossal. The individual is a mere atom. That is all one need say,

THE DISCOVERY

at the moment, of the effect of those overwhelming works of man.

Down into the basement restaurant of the Equitable, the most massive office building in the world. An immense plate of food is served—excellent food—together with iced water. It is my first experience of prohibition in its native home, and as Queen Victoria said on an historic occasion, we are not amused. Here in the richest spot in the world one cannot even buy a bottle of lager, though to me the atmosphere is that of a Turkish bath. Think of it! And months and months of iced water to come. My copious lunch, with water, rolls and butter, a wholesale helping of apple pie, and coffee, comes to something like nine shillings. As we go out I look carefully round at the well-dressed men who are lunching. There was not a face that might not be seen in Lombard Street. That impressed me mightily. But I was looking at the best in Wall Street. It was an impression that New York as a whole did not live up to.

We enter the Woolworth Building. Why? Anyhow, we enter the Woolworth Building. I am a rubberneck. A pale, subdued woman of thirty-five, who looks hardly adventurous enough to serve in a London teashop, whizzes us at terrific speed up to heaven. She ought to be murmuring, "Pot of tea and a buttered scone." Instead she crashes up to the fortieth floor. There a small Hebrew squeezes out of the packed elevator to go to his office. Imagine having an office on the fortieth floor! One wonders what he sells there. Balloons, one hopes.

So to the top. Nearly eight hundred feet of it. New York below, with all its puzzling arrangement of land and water. Ellis Island, sunshine, mist and smoke. The outside balcony gives me the creeps. There is a private police guard who mentions that nobody in his experience has ever gone over, but that if they did there would be nothing to record except the bump. It is appalling to have buildings like this. Also

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

the Woolworth Building inside is very much of a cheap show, with picture-postcards and souvenirs. I prefer it in all its majesty from the harbour.

So the bewildering day wears on. At night another friend, who knew New York in the long ago, when there were no skyscrapers, takes me walking, and describes the immense changes that a few years have made. We mingle in the electric glare and the seething crowds of Broadway, and elsewhere, nearer the Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street region, look up on the fantastic spectacle of immense buildings lighted tier after tier to the stars. There is nothing like this elsewhere in the world. Fairyland, magnified immensely, with anything that may be garish or brutal by day softened by night. It is overwhelming, even stunning. In fact I am a little bit frightened. Man was not made to live like this.

And near the Public Library, mercifully modest in height and showing that dignity does not depend alone on soaring stories, we come on a strange thing. A man is on the pavement with a large telescope, pointing at an almost full moon. I have ten cents' worth of moon, and feel that I am meeting an old friend in a strange land. I point out a star lying near the moon.

"That's Jupiter," says the astronomer, who has a strong German accent. "She is now more than three hundred and fifty million miles away. She has four moons, just like our earth has one moon. Three to the right. One to the left."

Three hundred and fifty million miles. It seems a long way, even in a country of such great distances.

He fits on another eyepiece. There, large as a plum, is Jupiter. To right and left are the four moons. It is astounding. I have never seen Jupiter's moons before. They do me good. They "check up" New York. They assure me that there really will come a limit to what man can do with steel and stone, and that even when in a year or so forty stories

THE DISCOVERY

come sixty or eighty it will be all the same to Jupiter. It a comforting train of thought. So much so that I gratefully hand the astronomer some more money.

"You're splashing it," says my guide and friend, as we walk away. "Half a dollar's too much even for New York." But I explain to him that I am quite content, knowing at however long I stay in America I have just made the easiest purchase I shall ever find there. *

* The Author's friend on this occasion was Mr. R. D. Blumenfeld, of London, who is the best guide a stranger could have to old and new New York.

THE CITY OF MELODRAMA

THERE FOLLOWS A WEEK in New York! Not "A week in Lovely Lucerne," certainly. But how much more interesting in some ways—or shall we say melodramatic? And how impossible to say in the compass of a few words what one feels about it.

Before I landed in New York many Americans, here and there, had said to me: "Of course, New York is not American. Remember that. It's not the real America. It's too cosmopolitan. . . ."

I used to wonder what was worrying them. I knew New York was all right, even though I had never seen it. Different from London or Paris, of course. That was to be expected, and desired. But a very wonderful city indeed. Everybody knew that. So why all this qualification about it—why all these warnings?

"Don't judge America by New York." As though one would. And as though it would matter if one did.

Well, well. One learns. Despite a lifetime of disillusion, of never finding any place what one had previously thought it, I had a fixed idea about New York which no amount of veiled warnings would disturb. And now I had to admit that the Americans who tried to prepare me knew their America and their New York better than I did.

New York is wonderful when you first meet it. But it isn't what one imagined it to be. It is in some ways incredibly magnificent. Yet in many ways it is terribly disappointing. I think that when one calls it a melodramatic city the right and just comment has been made.

It is probably the high quality of American magazine advertising that is responsible for any misconceptions—all

THE CITY OF MELODRAMA

to New York's advantage—which the English may harbour about America's first city.

Everybody knows those magazine advertisements. Whether they concern fountain pens, motor-cars or merely linoleum, they all give the impression of a world elegant, refined and splendid, inhabited exclusively by the most charming people. If an American manufacturer advertised a brand of "Hot Dogs" in the magazines he would do so against a background of the very best society. "Hot Dogs in the Home" would be very pampered dogs living in very splendid homes. No English observer reading about them would feel that they were merely sausages.

In my innocence, then, having seen aristocrats consuming breakfast foods, and patricians looking most concerned over the question of ice-cream freezers, I was prepared to find New York all that London is as a well-managed city, with all the magnificence of towering architecture and the pleasing display of newly acquired wealth added to London's own sober qualities. But New York is nothing of the kind. No traveller's description that I have read gives any real indication of it. Nor, I am afraid, will this. We will come to it later when we know a little more about the subject.

But for the moment let us nibble at the matter. There are large sections of what one may fairly call central New York which have much of the aspect of a gold-rush town that has been thrown together in a hurry and allowed to stay like that. In these regions—important business regions—there are shabby pavements, holes in the streets, and a general air of municipal inefficiency. This was the last thing I had expected. Of late years, since the war, I had grieved to feel that London's Strand was a rather shabby old thoroughfare, unworthy of its name and fame. I had wondered sometimes what Americans felt as they walked down it. I shall never worry unduly again.

Yet this, alone, is an absurdly inadequate idea to give

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

of New York. Near this shabbiness and untidiness, which are not things of yesterday, but are now of considerable antiquity, there exist regions of magnificence of which one feels, on first discovering them, that it is impossible to give an adequate description. One discovers Fifth Avenue, and at once agrees that here is something really worth talking about. That impression is heightened by some of the vistas of magnificence, and groupings of audacious buildings, that tower up near Central Park : soaring masterpieces of stone and steel which surpass in audacity anything that the Gothic masters dreamed of—and are hotels, not cathedrals ! And the climax comes with Park Avenue.

In the most striking section of that majestic thoroughfare the buildings are not, as New York goes, of enormous height. They are principally what are known as apartment houses—flats—of about sixteen stories. They are built of dull red brick, with sparing ornamentations of stone, and never since the world began has brick been better used.

These communal palaces are masterpieces of restraint and good taste. They are only a few years old. Fifty years of life should add greatly to their beauty, although there is plenty of that already. They are steel inside, and they are built over concealed railway tracks that run far beneath them. If you think of how it is all done they are as material as anything can be. On the other hand they are as magnificent as anything that architecture has given to the modern world. . . . And some of the flats inside them are rented at £10,000 a year. These are duplex and even triplex flats—that is, with whole floors removed, and no doubt baronial halls built into them, and certainly organs.

This is the richest social colony in the world. This is where all that the naïve and possibly envious European has ever heard of American riches is most thickly concentrated. The sensational novelist, toying with the popular gambit of a leading character of immense wealth, need only walk dream-

THE CITY OF MELODRAMA

ing down Park Avenue and pick one from any window. This is where wealth is so swollen that it almost bursts. And indeed, in describing itself, it does burst. Park Avenue has an imposing publication of its own, the *Park Avenue Social Review*, which is not to be seen by the eye of the multitude, even if the multitude wanted to see it. And describing its own glories, and choosing its own type, the *Park Avenue Social Review* says :

“THERE ARE MORE MILLIONAIRES TO THE SQUARE BLOCK ON PARK AVENUE than to the SQUARE MILE of any other residential section in the world. There is at least one building—ONE APARTMENT HOUSE—on Park Avenue which houses more millionaires than ANY CITY the size of Syracuse upon this civilised, or uncivilised, hemisphere.”

And much more like it, all just as astonishing. Down the centre of Park Avenue runs a long and narrow street garden. In this boulevard of millionaires one would expect it to be all that a street garden can be. But instead it is almost a disgrace : a miserable affair of sparse grass, bearing evidence of nobody's care.

Here, half a century ago, there were freight yards and factories. Now a plot a hundred feet square is worth two million dollars. On such a plot live millionaires by the dozen—more than there are in all Syracuse ! And yet nobody looks after the little bit of garden in the street.

That is one of the oddities about New York. However its wealth may swell and its stock market boom, there is nobody in all the great city who can be found to look after such little bits of garden as there are.

An incredible city. A city with its swarming populations of Russian Jews, Italians, Slavs, and every other kind of people ; with its flourishing criminals, its Chinese quarter, its town of coloured people at Harlem, and its very alarming-looking taxi-drivers, quite a few of whom are just as alarm-

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

ing as they look; and on the other hand the chaste majesty of Park Avenue. Flats at £10,000 a year—and policemen who walk up and down twirling their very formidable-looking clubs, and carrying large “guns.” Never has there been such a city of contrasts, such a mixture of East Side and West Side. New York is one long, everlasting melodrama.

One evening I walked through the astounding press of Broadway, at the section where the Great White Way is at its whitest, reflecting on these things. The stunning effect of towering buildings had now worn off. After a day or two one no longer gapes upwards merely because buildings are high. One accepts them. Only when some newly discovered example of architectural audacity or majesty discovers itself does one remain to gaze.

I was observing instead the crowds on the sidewalks, but with not too keen a perception of what I was seeing. I was too distracted by noise, too careful of whom I might bump into, too dazzled by the lavish display of light—too stunned by New York in general—to realise quite what I was looking at, to be in the slightest degree sure of my values. True I was conscious that if these were the people of fabled Broadway they were not worth coming far to see; that the crowd was one of very low grade, that it looked much less pleasant than a crowd in the Mile End Road, with a strong admixture of Stamboul and Smyrna. But I was frankly bewildered, because I couldn't believe that this was the real Broadway and its people. There were scraps of O. Henry in my mind, and memories of Potash and Perlmutter. Also some thoughts on that amazing book *The Gangs of New York*, one of the most interesting social documents ever written. . . . Was I in the Tenderloin region, and how many of these people were as bad as they looked?

The next morning I lay in bed reading a massive newspaper sixty-eight pages thick. From this I learned that half

THE CITY OF MELODRAMA

an hour after I had pursued my musing but bewildered way past a certain spot in Broadway, bright with a hundred thousand electric lights, and with at least ten thousand people in the immediate surroundings, two gentlemen had walked up to another one and efficiently put five shots into his body.

The victim at the moment was shaking hands with a friend. He sank to the pavement still shaking, so to speak. The gunmen disappeared into the seething crowds and were seen no more. The victim was efficiently rushed to hospital. He would answer no questions about his assailants, but as he was placed on the operating table, he said: "I'll take care of them myself when I get well." The latest news I could find of him was that he was not likely to get well.

A bewildering city, when something at any moment may happen on Broadway that is more melodramatic than the melodrama of the same name dared to be. In the play the villain "bumped off"—delightful phrase—his man between four walls, and even then was very worried about it. In real life the bumping off is done on the sidewalk, and nobody seems to think it is very much out of the way.

Very bewildering. This question of politeness, for instance. One had long been accustomed to believe that there was very little politeness in New York. . . . And a more prolonged acquaintance shows that on the whole this is true.

But at first I found a great deal: in my hotel, in shops, in all sorts of places. It is true that I was very polite myself. But everywhere I received full measure in return. On more than one occasion the fact that I was a stranger—and by Jupiter, an English one at that!—brought its special touch of pleasantness. . . . It is true, all the same, that if one were not polite in New York the "come back" would be very swift.

There is a very charming phrase which runs like a refrain through New York life as I found it. It is the equivalent of

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

the " 'k you " of London, and the " merci bien " of Paris. It is " You're welcome." You buy something, or ask for something. The transaction is done. You say " Thank you "—to shop assistant, clerk, door-keeper or whatnot—and at once comes the complement, " You're welcome." There is an old-world touch about it that is as unexpected as it is delightful. Human nature is very much the same everywhere.*

Very bewildering, very violent in its contrasts. Within a few minutes' walk of Park Avenue, in one of the city's most expensive hotels, I watch a millionaire of large financial dimensions shaking up a cocktail mixture. It is his own sitting-room, and we are a party of four. It is my first illicit drink, and various emotions assail me as I take it. As far as fear goes there should be very little reason for it in this case. My millionaire takes every reasonable precaution. His bootlegger is very high in his profession. What is more, my rich acquaintance, like all men of his kind, has his drink analysed before taking. " A1 at Lloyds," so to speak. The usual prohibition stories go round. One has read this sort of thing a thousand times. All the same it is very interesting to meet it. My first cocktail *sub rosa* is more thrilling than desperate stories of hi-jackers over the cable.

A few nights later, with a friend and his wife, I enter a " speak-easy." It is a building of only four stories in a quiet street—a typical New York street of thirty years ago, full of what are dearly and sentimentally known as " Brownstone fronts"—and looks like a modest Brighton boarding-house. A ring at the bell. My friend has a card. We are admitted. Inside it is more than ever like a boarding-house—a rather depressing one. The wallpaper is red and dingy.

* A magazine article in the *New York Times* explains that many large corporations are teaching their employees politeness as part of salesmanship and " service." It is an excellent idea because, if only from force of acquired habit, it means that politeness in business hours is likely to be copied in other relations of life.

THE CITY OF MELODRAMA

There is a bar. In a room of modest size a few people are dining. They are in these dim but expensive surroundings only because Bacchus may be met there.

I am in hopes that a policeman on his beat will pop in for a friendly drink, as so often happens in these places, but that touch is missing. Anyhow, I claim the privilege of paying. Three sherrys at a dollar each. Half a dollar tip. I make a remark in French. The waiter, surprisingly, takes it up: "*Ça va bien, Monsieur. C'est du premier qualité.*" After that one drinks with confidence. But fourteen shillings for three sherrys of very modest quality! And that is a very humdrum experience.

So one might go on. . . . New York, with its everlasting clang and clamour coming up to one's twelfth-story bedroom, hours after one has gone to bed: fire alarms, the Elevated, the screeching brakes of taxis. New York with its seething crowds of citizens who seem foreign in a world that speaks English; its magnificence and its drabness; its brusqueness and its "You're welcome"; its astonishing wealth and its hard-working multitudes; its flourishing criminals and its earnest idealists; its many descendants of Old Country stock who never forget their origin, and its multitudes who do not know what the Old Country means, and would not care a potato peeling if they did—there never was a city like it. A thrilling melodrama, day and night, and more like the movies than the movies can ever hope to be.

And all this was only the briefest of "once overs." I had to move on to see America, and as far as any real acquaintance with New York was concerned the first city of America had to be the last.

PEACE IN BOSTON

BOSTON ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON !

How shall one describe the peace of it after the roar and racket of New York ? It is like a blessing. If one of the chief interests of life lies in contrast, then here is a "kick" indeed. But it is a pleasant one.

Yet oddly enough it is in gentle Boston, home of culture, that I collide with my first example of the traditional American brusqueness. In my best manner I request some information from a young lady at one of the hotel windows. Before I am half-way through she cuts in coldly, without looking at me :

"What say ?"

I begin to repeat my little piece with all the urbanity of the late Sir Charles Hawtrey. She again interrupts with a jerk of the head :

"Next winder." And she looks dreamily beyond me as though I wasn't there.

This is disconcerting, but it is balanced a few moments later by the nice young man at the tobacco stand on the opposite side of the hall. I buy a cigar and exchange a few words.

"English ?" he asks.

I admit it.

"We've gotta hand it you fellers," he says pleasantly. "You certainly can make mixtures for pipe smoking."

This sends my self-esteem soaring again. The brusque young lady is forgotten. And I reflect that it is this sort of thing that makes intercourse between nations so valuable and illuminating.

First impressions of Boston make it difficult to realise

PEACE IN BOSTON

that one is on the same continent as New York. Five hours of comfortable railway journey—and here is another world. One hesitates to say it, because Boston has belonged to the United States for quite a long time now, but it is at first sight almost like home.

A skyscraper or so here and there—just modest affairs of twenty stories or so—but for the rest, as far as the centre of things is concerned, just an English city. Streets that are twisty with names on them. The relief of reading Arlington Street after struggling with 149 West 142nd Street, and similar mathematical abominations! For a man with no head for figures New York is as bad as going back to school.

A number is an elusive thing, and if your destination in New York is 57 East 75th Street, then your only means of getting there are either to take a taxi—which is slow but fairly sure—or to go on foot and repeat the number constantly, only to find after a while that you are reciting the wrong number.

But to Boston. I started out on a walk of exploration late on a Sunday afternoon, and the sight of those twisty streets, with the familiar English names on them, was like the greeting of an old friend. In certain American hotels you will find on your bedside table—together with a Bible—an anthology of selected pieces, all of high moral tone. (There is also a warning that you must on no account leave your bedroom door unlocked.) In this anthology there is a poem, a favourite in the United States, and deservedly so, which exhorts you to be a good fellow and to be particularly kind to a man down on his luck. It tells you to walk up to him and :

Say hello, and how d'you do.

That's what Arlington Street, Bedford, Dartmouth, and the rest did to me. Not for nothing was I in New England. And though I was told later that Boston is not so English

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

now as it was twenty or thirty years ago—and Mr. Upton Sinclair indeed has written a very long novel, all about Sacco and Vanzetti, which shows how different New England is from Old England, when you dig into it—there seemed a great deal of it on this first acquaintance.

I discovered a long row of houses with nice eighteenth-century countenances that might have been in Cheltenham or Canterbury. It is true that there were U.S. marines and sailors about the streets who reminded me that Boston is a naval port belonging to somebody else, and that years ago there was a famous Tea Party—since which time America has refused to take tea seriously. But that sort of history did not seem to matter when, in the dusk, I saw the front door of an old English house open and an old lady emerge who looked as though she was about to step into her Victoria and drive through Kensington. It is true that she stepped into an automobile instead. But one must expect that sort of thing nowadays, even in Boston.

Quiet streets. The hush of a Sabbath evening. English-looking churches. The illusion is almost complete. It isn't quite any English city that I was ever in, but it might easily be one that I had never visited. The cinemas are open, here and there. They are starring the first presentation of a picture that I happen to have seen in London months before. That helps the illusion. I feel farther from Hollywood than if I were in Piccadilly Circus.

Returned to the hotel, I savour the peace of a bedroom disturbed by no clamour from below. It is an illusion, by the way, to think that being high up in a building diminishes the noises of the streets. Sound, like hot air, rises, and pursues you just as implacably on the twentieth floor as on the second. But on this Sunday evening there is no noise. There is instead a view across the pleasant gardens that lie in the centre of the city, and the air is of an

PEACE IN BOSTON

amazing crystal clearness so that the street lamps shine like diamonds. It is an atmosphere that would seem to be the very fount of pep and drive. But, thank goodness, there is no evidence of those qualities at the moment.

The bedroom is fitted with radio. A touch of the switch brings to me a first-class orchestral programme. In the middle of it an announcer with a voice of gold comes on to say that the programme is provided by the Turko-Persian Carpet Corporation. He describes the carpets briefly, and mentions that a sure way to identify them is to look for the woven mark on the back. So to more delightful music. This part of the programme ends with a selected hymn for the evening, "Abide With Me," following which the announcer once more mentions the little matter of the carpets.

This is how America gets its very varied radio programmes—beauty mixed with a little business, with every different kind of entertainment carrying a different brand. England's B.B.C., of course, would swoon with outraged dignity if any breath of advertisement went on the air. But America's system apparently works extremely well, and does ensure variety. And what does it matter what kind of carpets or cigarettes they are so long as they provide a nation with its songs?

Anyhow the radio sings me to sleep, which is very nice of it, even if I do find I have missed my dinner.

Asked by a kind Boston citizen next day where it would please me to go by motor-car, I mention Salem, which I dimly remember is known for its old-world atmosphere. Salem is something you don't meet in America every day—a town which years ago was more noteworthy than it is to-day. In a land where cities are constantly striding forwards, it is nice to hear of one which has the imagination to fall behind in the march of progress. Perhaps, as the

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

years roll by, a new kind of town-boosting slogan will arise in America :

Come to Salem, where Time stands still.

The old port made history in the days of the old racing clippers. Its story, of course, goes back much farther than that, to the earliest days of the Pilgrim Fathers. Witches were burnt there, and Nathaniel Hawthorne used the town in his pages. More recently, I think, Joseph Hergesheimer placed his *Java Head* there.

And here is where the American explorer is superior to the English variety. If an American had been visiting a Salem in England he would have known all about it beforehand. Anything I knew was vague. Nor could my Boston citizen help me very much. He had not been worrying to any extent about places like Salem in his busy and prosperous life.

The outskirts of Boston showed that, despite first impressions, it is an American city. A world alive with automobiles, and gasoline sold by the roadside, instead of petrol. Signs of an intensive modern commerce everywhere, which had encroached even on Harvard, where we paused for a little while. So to what at first sight was the depressing boot manufacturing city of Lynn, which after a few moments disclosed suburban houses of a delightful type and a little farther a beautiful residential sea-front gracious as anything that could be found in England. And so to Salem, where we inquired for Turner Street, in which is situated the House of the Seven Gables, known to all readers of Hawthorne, and visited by many thousands of Americans annually.

We found it after a mazy search that would have done credit to any English small town. Built somewhere about 1640. Very quaint. Open fire-places, andirons, snuffers, secret staircase, picture postcards—everything. The pretty

PEACE IN BOSTON

young lady who told us all about it was very serious and refused to smile. All the proceeds from visitors—I think the fee was a quarter of a dollar—go to settlement work.

The way we “did” that pleasant old place was scandalous. No fabled American tourist doing Europe in a week ever moved faster. (We had a “date” back in Boston). An Englishman looking for the olden days in New England—not an American in England—and doing it in a scamper! It was not done by way of revenge, but perhaps it was one.

We lunched late at the Hawthorne Hotel, and then hurried away. That was about all I saw of Salem. It looked modern and prosperous enough, while retaining here and there a great deal of its old-world air. In short, Salem is very much what many English places of the smaller size and considerable antiquity are: a blend of the old and the new, with no hearts permanently broken because petrol pumps have added their own bit of history where there was so much already.

That night at Boston I went to see a play in which the whole action passed in an American criminal court, with opposing counsel bullying each other—and the witnesses: in the manner which has now become familiar enough to theatrical audiences in England. I was already feeling acclimatised to the Englishness of this city of New England, but all the same the speech of the actors and actresses was a little surprising. It was exactly what one would have expected to hear in London. . . . Only after the performance was over did I learn that this was an English stock company, established successfully some five or six years before, and very much appreciated by all good Bostonians.

It was, if one was needed, the final touch. Judging from what I had so far seen, the movement towards adding the United States to the list of tourist resorts for the British is

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

not likely to attain any great dimensions for some time to come. Prices are too high and distances too great for the English idea of a holiday, and a cup of tea is not always easily come by. Besides, America does not need to import tourists. She has so many of her own for export. But should straitened circumstances ever make her copy the Swiss, then I can see Boston standing in the forefront of the movement, thoroughly well advertised as "A Home from Home for the English," and welcoming us with all the genteel airs and graces of a Brighton landlady.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY LIMITED

WE ARE RUNNING into Chicago on the Twentieth Century Limited, which as everybody knows is one of the crack trains of the United States. Barber and valet, maid and stenographer, club car, stock market quotations, telegrams—everything is arranged so that man or woman travelling from New York to Chicago may still retain touch with all the angels, or devils, of civilisation.

I am sitting on the observation platform with a chance American acquaintance, chatting about this and that. Breakfast is long over, the people who have paid to sleep in drawing-rooms are out of them, the negro porters have transformed the wide sleeping berths back into Pullman seats. We are running, on one railway track among many, through steel plants and many other evidences of an intense industry. Chicago is half an hour away.

My friend of the moment brings up—oddly enough!—the subject of Prohibition. He tells me the story of the two millionaire brothers of Chicago, the Dodge brothers, famous names in industrial America, manufacturers of motor-cars, who went to New York on a business visit. They had nothing to drink with them, and so in the suite of their expensive hotel sent out a “bell hop” to find something. He returned with an atrocious liquid masquerading as whisky which brought a lingering death to both of them.

One can imagine the scene. The page boy, the tip, the arrival of the waiter with glasses, soda water and ice, and then . . . !

“The hard luck part of it was that back here in Chicago, in their homes, they had cellars packed with the best,” says my companion.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

It occurs to me that, properly considered, this might be called nothing less than Greek tragedy—these two kings of wealth, both young as things go to-day, leaving their palatial homes and their carefully analysed stocks of liquor behind, and finding death in a suite of a Ritz-Carlton-Plaza as the result of one injudicious drink. An irony as biting as the stuff they drank.

We overtake and pass a huge freight train, scores of long steel cars. Many of them are labelled Sunshine Express, and they are bringing fruit from California.

"See those two fellows dropping off that freight car," says my acquaintance. "They're hoboes. They've got to get off before that train gets into Chicago."

So at last, after meeting them in literature for many years, I see my first American railway tramps. Having lunched, dined, and breakfasted on my own train, glanced at the stock quotations and wondered who the deuce I could send a telegram to, I see them dropping off their train. No deferential negro porters to say "Yes, sah!" and flick them with a clothes brush. No voluminous menus at a dollar a portion. Just a heavy boot from a brakeman, if they are discovered. How different life can be. Yet one is told that hoboes are often quite happy.

And thinking of them, I think again about the millionaire brothers who found death in a drink. Also about that poem familiar in youth called "The Shirt of a Happy Man." . . . Perhaps the hoboes have it, after all, if we only knew. But all things considered, I don't want to be one.

All long-distance trains are romantic. This one materially helps in discovering America for me. We pass one Main Street after another, small and smaller, with their wooden frame houses, corner stores, and often glimpses of pleasant streets with lawns running to the road. They make me think of stories I have read in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Everywhere automobiles, of all ages, stand waiting patiently,

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY LIMITED

in all sorts of attitudes. Somehow they have the appearance of docile dogs awaiting their masters. In flash after flash one sees bits of the real America, quite out of touch with Park Avenue, New York City.

The observation platform is quite fascinating in its way, when one can obtain a seat. But I am not too fortunate. Having lost time, we are now making it up—the Twentieth Century pays you a dollar for every minute it is late—and the tail of the train moves in a cloud. Three times I wash, and comb coal dust out of my hair, then I give it up and retire to the club car, where one may read the magazines and perhaps talk to strangers.

Which reminds me that nobody has ever said “Say, stranger.” America has changed in many ways since we first read about it.

In the early evening we arrive at Syracuse, and pass right through the heart of it, very slowly. It is fascinating. Mean streets at first—a Chinese laundry, small shops, and whatnot. Then through the very centre of the city, bumping slowly across the principal streets, the bell on our huge engine ringing out its incessant clang, clang, clang. We pass street cars, cinemas, citizens, everything. We are, indeed, in the main street. Perhaps it is Main Street. A big department store has a sale on, and I note a cheap line in electric washing machines at 118 dollars. Also a shop with the sign “Mose the Broker. Money to Loan.” . . . Mose sure knows how to get to the heart of a subject.

Strange to have this one fugitive peep at the heart of a strange city, and then to pass on, leaving it forever behind. For a few moments we were as much a part of its life as the street cars halted to allow our passage. Then, after a brief halt in the station, we go on, and Syracuse might not have been.

As we passed slowly through, somebody within the train told a story of a relative of his—English, I think—who

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

years before had gone to Syracuse, found the district was rich in some sort of mineral, and had gone away with a million dollars within the year, leaving Syracuse to deal with a source of wealth worth many times more than the original million. What sort of mineral it was I forget, and it doesn't matter.

But it helped one to realise that Syracuse is a place of many people and the usual activities, and has been there quite a long time. The usual newspapers—they come aboard, bulky as ever, and full of the same old comic strips—its mayor and police force, its average allowance of skyscrapers, its pleasant suburbs, its gossip on the porches, its radio, cafeterias, drug stores, crime and all the rest. To Syracuse the passage of the Twentieth Century Limited must have seemed the tiniest possible incident at the close of a busy day. To us on the train Syracuse seemed but an unimportant moment on our passage between two greater cities. . . . No doubt we were both satisfied.

But if Mose the Broker should ever read this I hope he will be glad to learn that I read his sign. If ever I have to linger in his city I shall perhaps call in. Perhaps have to.

So on through the night, across one State after another, two furlongs of steel sleeping-cars. Some hours beyond Syracuse I awoke in my wide bunk and saw through the window that the heavens were luminous with stars of such magnificence as I have never seen before. A one-time British naval officer on the train mentioned to me next morning that he had never seen anything like them. So it must have been something unusual in starshine. . . . This, I think, would be in Ohio.

An hour or so after contemplating the stars I awoke again and saw an amazing red sun just rolling up above

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY LIMITED

the horizon. It was too splendid a dawn to go to sleep on, but I did it all the same. . . . This, I think, would be in Indiana.

So into Illinois, where Chicago lies, then breakfast, and the talk at the rear of the train about the two millionaire brothers who died that bootleggers may flourish.

Another great moment, this, the approach to Chicago. I found it quite impossible to assemble from all that I had ever heard of it any definite impression of what the city would be like. One had heard so much about it, principally of a not very encouraging kind. Stories, principally, of desperadoes; of sawn-off shotguns, gangsters and, of course, of the feelings entertained by Mayor Thompson against anybody unfortunate enough to be born an Englishman.

What would it really be like? If a mild Englishman found himself frightened by New York, what on earth would be his reactions to Chicago? Presumably he would go in definite terror of his life. Yet Chicago, one was told, was a city thirty miles across, more or less, with a population which according to some informants was three millions and according to others five. And those Chicago business men with whom I had talked on the train seemed perfectly normal. One of them had told me that he had left New York to live in Chicago, and wouldn't go back again for anything. Strange. I wanted to ask him how often he had been told to put 'em up. But of course one couldn't ask that sort of thing.

Among these three or five million people there must be many who led normal lives. And yet the stories one had read were not inventions. And Mayor Thompson was true. . . . Altogether a great puzzle. The only thing I was really sure of was that Chicago was building some really beautiful boulevards round the city. All sorts of

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

people had mentioned those. The insistence on those boulevards made me fear the worst, but I hoped for the best.

Anyhow, here is Chicago, with a white porter gathering up my baggage. He seems all right. Busy streets, an Elevated, a wide thoroughfare that is like no other I have ever seen. Princes Street, Edinburgh, only with much higher buildings, and with Lake Michigan as a prospect, separated by three hundred yards width of gardens in the making. This is Michigan Boulevard. I had never dreamed of this. It is on quite a tremendous scale.

So to the hotel. Three thousand bedrooms. Three thousand baths. Largest in the world. I am shot up to the nineteenth floor. There is apparently no limit to this sort of thing. I began in New York on the twelfth. Here I have risen to the nineteenth. Some day they will be shooting me up to the fortieth.

I open a suitcase to see if a certain bottle, presented to me by a kind acquaintance in New York, with every guarantee of wholesomeness, is safe after the journey. It is the first of a number of presents of the kind which come to me during my American journeyings, and each one I regarded as a great mark of favour. Among acquaintances in cities one could rely on being looked after adequately. But in the great waste spaces traversed by the Pullmans it was very comforting to have a friendly bottle in one's bag—even though application to it was sometimes a matter requiring every discretion.

This bottle, first of the series, was safe. I telephoned for a waiter and asked for soda water and ice. (You must have ice, whether you want it or not, and it arrives by the pound.) A little later, the mixture made, I think once more of the millionaire brothers. Curious that the simple act I am engaged in should be the cause of so much drama,

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY LIMITED

day by day, of murders uncountable, and of tales of bloody piracy on the high roads that would have astonished Blackbeard or Captain Kidd.

And that done, out to see what there really was in this fabulous city of Chicago—if *messieurs les assassins* would permit it.

CHICAGO

OF CHICAGO one may say this at once—it is an immense surprise. Never did I find a city less like one's expectations of it—whatever they may have been.

I found it in a late autumn heat wave which sent the thermometer up to eighty-eight degrees. It was no excuse to learn from the newspapers that this was a record for forty years.

From the same newspaper I learned on page one (continued on page sixty-seven) that there had been a brisk shooting-up a few hours before my arrival. This was in no sense a celebration of that event. It was merely normal, an affair of gangs. The leading actor in the affair, one Spike O'Donnell, is a local celebrity. The newspaper headlines, of no great size, which called attention to his adventure, said :

“O'Donnell Ducks, Escapes 50 Shots. . . . Flattens on Floor as Gun Crew Rakes his Brother's Garage. . . . Bullets Nip Clothes.”

Spike must have been in luck. There was a photo of him—a smiling young man, rather like Carpentier.

This, I felt, promised well, too well, and wondered what city I should pass on to next.

However, an hour later I was enjoying the hospitality of what may truly be called a palatial club—having seen something of Chicago's architectural surprises on the way—where one could do everything. There was a magnificent barber's shop in the basement. Hot and tired I lay back in a luxurious chair and let the barber do to me exactly what other members of the club were submitting to. I should never have dreamed of behaving like this in London. But

CHICAGO

Americans treat themselves well in such matters and I saw no reason why I should not be one of them for once.

In the latter stages, when hot towels and other things had been taken from me and I saw that business and professional men of considerable age were being manicured by pretty young ladies, I felt that the process of beautification might be carried farther. But the prettiest of the young ladies would insist on being engaged. I talked local politics instead with my barber.

"You bet they could catch him if they wanted to," he said. (He was referring to John ("Dingbat") Oberta, a gunman on the run.) "But I reckon the police have been told not to get him."

This is the sort of thing to which a stranger can only listen, without comment. But there are plenty of Americans who willingly supply all the comment necessary.

Yet here am I writing about criminals when Chicago has so much else. Chicago, it ought to be said early, has been badly represented to the rest of the world. We hear all about its gang wars and nothing about the more admirable things to be found there. In some ways this extraordinary city has all the magnificence of New York without New York's intimidating expression. Perhaps this is accounted for by the fact that, by the time the traveller has arrived at Chicago, the awe inspired by buildings as high as Beachy Head has worn off. Chicago has its skyscrapers just as majestic as New York's. Some are just as beautiful as New York's best. Mr. Wrigley's building, its foundations well and truly laid in chewing gum, is lighted at night from base to summit by powerful batteries of concealed flood lights. The effect is astonishing.

But Chicago is not compressed, at so many tons to the square inch, as New York is. You do not feel that it has caught you in a trap, that there is no way out of its defiles and canyons. Before it is the immense lake, big as a sea,

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

though not so interesting. Behind it are the wide plains of Illinois. Its citizens say that it will one day be the greatest city in the world. They are probably right. New York on its rocky island must climb madly to the skies. Chicago can spread. There can be only one end to such a race. And London will look on, calmly.

Nor is there any real sense of descent in the metropolitan scale as one meets Chicago, after seeing New York. The shops are just as fine, the evidences of luxury just as glittering. There may be no single thoroughfare with quite all the dignity and majesty of Park Avenue, but Lakeside Drive is very magnificent. Splendid hotels and impressive blocks of apartment houses, with a sprinkling of private mansions still left, line the broad ornamental way, many miles in extent, that runs along the lake. I looked down on it at night from the window of one of those expensive flats. The lights curved away into infinity. The wide road was alive with shining motor traffic. One did not think less of the Thames Embankment at that sight, but one did think a great deal more of Chicago. And Chicago is still less than a hundred years old. In 1933 its oldest brick, if there is one such left, will be just a hundred. It is the only great city in the world which had not been even thought of a century ago.

And so sadly misunderstood by the world! A poor big rich feller whom nobody really knows. That insistence on her wonderful boulevards was quite justified. Many were finished long ago, and provide great sweeps of residential areas as fine as may be seen anywhere. Some, more civic in character, are only partially completed. They will be magnificent when finished, with quite a good deal of that imagination that went to the making of the Champs Elysées.

A kindly member of a millionaire family took me out a long drive to show me Chicago's best suburbs. An astonish-

CHICAGO

ing ride, in and out of the semi-country roads that run by and near the lake to the north of the city. Hundreds and hundreds of half-suburban, half-country houses, most of them in the very best taste, some exquisite examples of domestic architecture. An immense middle-class population of millionaires.

So many were there of these houses that I did not quite realise at first what I was looking at. I was thinking in terms of a first-class London suburb. Enquiries showed that some of these pleasant houses were standing on land that had been bought for sixty thousand dollars an acre. In the winter this vast colony of luxury is shut up, and the millionaires—medium, large, and extra—stay in their expensive and overwarmed flats in Chicago, many of which are bought outright. These transactions, by the way, are not done by means of that hire-purchase system of which we have heard so much.

It is really very difficult to get Chicago "over" by merely writing about it. I find it necessary, like the after-dinner speaker who feels that all is not going so well as it might, to take refuge in a story. . . . "It reminds me, ladies and gentlemen, of a story I heard the other day. . . ." This one was told me by an American lady during a short halt I made in a country house in my tour of the millionaire suburbs.

A year or so ago an Englishman about to travel to California from New York was advised to go via Chicago, and look it over. He refused. Asked why, he said he was afraid of the place, from all he had heard of it. Being over-persuaded he thereupon asked what would be the safest hotel to stay in. He was advised that the Drake would certainly be all right. Nothing could happen to anybody there.

Arrived in Chicago, he entered the hall of the hotel and was in the act of registering when there was a fusillade of

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

shots and a cashier was killed almost at his elbow. . . . The point of this true story is that the Englishman immediately continued on his way west. The poor cashier died to make a first-class anecdote.

As an interesting detail it should be mentioned that the cashier suffered from a nervous tic of the facial muscles which made him, every now and again, appear to smile. As one of the raiding gunmen poked his "gun" over the counter this tic declared itself, whereupon the gunman said, "I'll blow that smile off you," and killed him. Your hands may be up, but you mustn't smile.

Now this story simply cannot be understood—nor can Chicago—unless you have seen the Drake Hotel. I remember reading the story of the raid at the time, far away in London, and I took it for granted that such a drama happened in surroundings which, if they were not mean, were at any rate not very impressive: a business hotel of sorts, thronged by a very commercial crowd, with here and there an individual chewing gum.

Well, the Drake Hotel is not a bit like that. It stands in the very centre of Chicago's best West End, on the lake side. Without any desire to advertise, I must say that I have never anywhere seen a more luxurious hotel. One feels inclined to enter it on one's toes. Yet everything is in the best possible taste; it is luxury that soothes and doesn't hurt. . . . And it was into this chastely magnificent interior that four or five desperate ruffians, some under the influence of dope, rushed with their automatics, to rob and murder. It is satisfactory to know that one was shot by a policeman out in the street, and that several were later hanged, which is a notably fine sample of retributive justice for Chicago.

Another lady I met, very high in Chicago's society, had a flat very near to the Drake and happened to know the policeman who chased one of the bandits out into the street, killing him after an exchange of shots.

CHICAGO

"I hated doing it, ma'am," said this kind-hearted policeman. "He was that full of dope he was half asleep. But it had to be done."

And that's Chicago. And it isn't. Anyhow it happened. And Chicago apparently was quite a little bit shocked at the time. But not, I am afraid, as much as London would have been had such an event taken place in one of its best hotels. Too many similar affairs happen in the great city by the lake, although Chicago's citizens will protest to you that there are cities down south, with large coloured populations, where the killing rate per hundred thousand is much higher than her own. These figures are understood, just like population figures.

So that's the situation, or a hint of it. Behind all this energy, enterprise, and magnificence, unmatched in some ways by any other city, and forging ahead to a future which apparently has no limits of material success, lurks this constant social menace, mixed with bad politics. It has its daily reflection in the newspapers, and all Chicago is very much aware of it. Yet it is only aware as we in England are aware of the weather—something you may grumble at now and again, but must put up with. There are a great many citizens of Chicago who would prefer earnestly, even vehemently, to be without it. But since they see no way of achieving it they prefer to "forget it." So long as the gunmen behave with some degree of circumspection and, above all, confine themselves to their own private warfare, all is fairly well. It is, apparently, only when such an affair as that of the Drake Hotel flares out—or as when, say, seven gunmen are ranged against a wall and raked with machine-gun fire by a rival beer gang—that Chicago is really badly shocked.

There is so much else to think of, so much to do, so much to look at. A few million people go on living normal American lives, and presumably the philosophy is that the

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

chance of a crackling automatic putting an end to the existence of any one individual is so small that it is best not thought about. It is best to look on such incidents as you do on street-car accidents—unpleasant when they happen, but not likely to happen to you. London could never accept this point of view. Chicago has had a very different history, and does.

But even with that attempt at explanation Chicago must remain a misunderstood city to those who have never visited it, and have read only of those crimes that make such good newspaper stories for home and foreign consumption. Having discovered something of the real Chicago, I was sorry in many ways to leave it after only a short visit which, short as it was, had held much hospitality. Yet from what I saw of it I should hate to live there with anything less than fifty thousand dollars a year income. And since there was no prospect of that there was nothing to do but say *au revoir*, if not good-bye. It is one of those *chagrins* which can only be left to time to look after.

There is also the consolation that Chicago is bitterly cold in winter and is often blisteringly hot in summer. A week in Chicago is interesting. Perhaps a year would be a great trial.

But it is amazing that all the world should know so much about Chicago, and yet know so little about it; that the old flavour of hog-killing and the newer flavour of *organised* crime—so that hundreds and hundreds of “killings” can occur every year, and the killers remain undisturbed, protected by corrupt politicians—should be the only details about which the world in general is really aware concerning a city of three or four millions which has built magnificently for the present, and is laying down plans for even greater things for the future. We insist on saying how small the world is, but the amazing thing is how large it remains, so that Chicago remains unknown.

CHICAGO

"Chicago is destined to be the greatest city in the United States—in the world," said numbers of its proud citizens to me.

It is very possible. But late at night the stranger would be unwise to walk far back to his hotel. He might arrive there with no money to pay his bill. He might not arrive there at all. Yet despite this it is not so intimidating in its aspect as New York.*

There are several postscripts to all this. As you ride in Chicago's Yellow Cabs you may read a notice in each :

These Directors of the Yellow Cab Company are your guarantee that your wife, your children, and yourself are being handled by a Corporation with financial and moral responsibility.

The names of ten leading business men of Chicago follow. Chicago led the way with Yellow taxis, an idea that was copied all over the country. They mean that in a Yellow Cab you can rely on being safe, and that in any others you may not be. From time to time a "cab war" breaks out in Chicago. The other cab drivers don't like the Yellows, and the usual fusillade of automatics—or bombs—breaks out, in the street or in garages.

A few days after I had left the city the best known of these ten guarantors of public safety was asking for protection for his own life, at the same time announcing that he had sent his grandchild out of the State, because he feared she would be kidnapped—or as America spells it, kidnapped.

And a month or so later, far away in California, I find the following in a newspaper there :

* It is interesting to note that latterly the average daily total of holdups has decreased in Chicago because so many of the "stick-up men," together with the safe-blowers and burglars, went into the beer business, so that their killing is confined to gang wars. It is the only known testimonial to Prohibition, that here and there the night air has become somewhat less dangerous to the average citizen.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

"Racketeering as an industry has reached the full flower of its swift development, chiefly under the guidance of aliens, in the city of Chicago. A group of crooks desirous of living in luxury at the expense of industry single out some occupation and levy blackmail on all its members. The flinging of a few bombs, the perpetration of a few acts of sabotage, the maiming or killing of a few who have the courage to refuse submission to extortion presently reduces the besieged industry to a state of vassalage. Protection money is paid at regular intervals thereafter to the blackmailers for immunity.

"The Employers' Association of Chicago incredibly reports that there are now 163 such 'rackets,' each an organised criminal attack on legitimate business, and none can even guess how many are the rackets that prey on illegitimate businesses that cannot look for protection to the law. Wars for the control of rackets are waged between greedy gangs of criminals, as robber barons once fought for the exclusive right to prey on the helpless.

"We do not believe that anyone who reads the names of the racketeers, when they occasionally appear in print, will ever consent to the weakening in any respect of the immigration restrictions we belatedly imposed."

And a month or so after that, once more back in New York, I read the following, in the form of a newspaper telegram from Chicago to its great rival city :

" 'Well, well, well, is that so? All I can say is that a coffin a day keeps New York gangsters away from Chicago.'

"This pretty sentiment was expressed by Commissioner of Police Russell of Chicago to-day when he was told of the reported exodus to Chicago of Manhattan's crooks following the 'strong-arm' crusade of Grover Whalen, New York's new police boss, who believes in educating them with a club.

" 'Yes, sir,' remarked Commissioner Russell, 'they have had to bury thirty-two hoodlums who tried to argue

CHICAGO

with Chicago's cops in the past three months and a couple of hundred are in the hospitals. If the gangsters think New York's police are getting too tough, just let them come to Chicago and they'll find out what a hard cop is really like. Our boys are just getting their target practice in shape. Thirty-two buried in three months. We've stopped using clubs long ago out here. It's guns that count. If the Gotham hoodlums think this is a healthy climate for a winter vacation, let them come.'

"Deputy Commissioner of Police Stege, in charge of Chicago detectives, said that the local talent among the hoodlums and booze peddlers would come to the support of the police in freezing out any New Yorkers Whalen thinks he has forced from their home grounds.

" 'Any Easterners who think they can cut in on any Chicago bum's racket had better think again,' allowed Chief Stege. 'The native outlaws run a closed corporation hereabouts, and competition is not healthy. If any outsider gets going in a small way, first thing he knows he goes for a ride and wakes up in the morgue.'

"Both Commissioner Russell and Chief Stege doubted if any New York underworld heroes would come to Chicago and said they would probably go South for the winter.

" 'We won't bother to chase them out of town,' said Russell. 'We'll meet them at the train and ship them back in nice pine boxes. Silver coffins are a needless expense and the city is hard up now. Our motto is to shoot first and then holler halt.' "

How delightful—for one great city to be matching its crooks against another's. And what an astonishing mixture of barbarism and civilisation it reveals Chicago to be.

But it is all so very American. . . . In fact we may say, simply, that it is America. And by her newspapers shall ye know her!

SOCIETY IN ST. LOUIS

"FLOORS, PLEASE!" says the young lady who controls the elevator.

As likely as not she is pretty. Pretty or not, she is probably wonderfully made up. Cosmetics stand high in the United States list of industries.

In an American hotel, especially if it is of large size, one spends a considerable portion of one's stay in the lifts. If you are staying on the nineteenth floor and down in the hall find you have forgotten something—then back you must go, obviously, to the nineteenth. An express elevator is a very swift vehicle once it is working. But like a train it must be caught, and like a train it may be missed. And on the seventeenth floor a convention may be meeting for lunch—probably is—so that some hundreds of professional men are waiting to go up at the moment that you are.

Thus there are delays. One spends much time in elevators. Up and down. . . . The lift fills up. Thirteen men are in it. A lady, of plain aspect, steps in. Thirteen hats sweep off, with all the precision of guardsmen at the salute. Every man now stands as if petrified. It is America's most striking tribute to woman.

"Floors, please!"

For a moment or so the packed mass is dumb. Then numbers spring up here and there. It is like an auction.

"Seven," says a voice, rather timidly.

"Nine." Somebody has gone two better.

"Thirteen."

"Twenty-three."

So one goes up again—back for that something left behind. One sighs on such occasions for the Rose and

SOCIETY IN ST. LOUIS

Crown in the High Street, with only two floors to bother about. In the most efficient country in the world an immense amount of time is wasted in elevators, or waiting for them, whether you forget anything or not.

The girls who work these elevators interest me. Some are quite pretty enough to account for it, without any other reason. But apart from that they are so imperturbable, so passionless, so mechanical. One would say that it is quite impossible to break through their icy reserve. Love has never touched them.

But one day I almost accomplish it. Alone in an express elevator, with a pretty operator, descending swiftly to earth. A gentle bombardment of words, and I almost register a hit. Her impassive face suddenly breaks into a smile, a very nice smile. Then we reach the ground floor.

"You can't kid a kidder," she says, flinging back the door, and that romance is over.

"Floors, please!"

Half an hour out of Chicago we run through Joliet. A fellow-passenger points out the State penitentiary and mentions that Leopold and Loeb, the young ghouls of Chicago who established a record in cold-blood murder, are there.

"The worst of it is, they're talking of letting them out," he says.

Not much more of interest—just rather depressing plains—until we reach St. Louis. Here is the wide Mississippi, with a stern-wheeler below the bridge that recalls the *Robert E. Lee*, *Dixie*, the *Show Boat*, and all sorts of things.

Many people have told me, Americans among them, that the cities of the United States are all the same. "Put you down in the centre of any one of fifty cities," it is said, "and you wouldn't know which it was." It is only true to some extent. A St. Louis drug-store looks like any other, and here as elsewhere local pride has insisted on skyscrapers

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

which are probably bigger than the necessities of real estate demand. But St. Louis has its own personality, which is reflected in many manifestations of an intense civic pride.

It is true that you could live a week in the "downtown" section—the region where the skyscrapers, cinemas, and drug-stores are—and never suspect what lies a little way farther out. Parks on the grandest scale, boulevards that are not quite what Paris knows, but just as good in their way, striking residential districts. Forest Park is an immense tract of beautiful country, subdued to a city's requirements. Linden Boulevard is a very fine thoroughfare. Prominent in it are the imposing temples of Masons, Shriners, Elks, and other brotherhoods.

I left a very charming flat overlooking Forest Park and, according to the newspapers, missed by only a few minutes an interesting assassination on this same Linden Boulevard. An "extortionist" murder; a member of an Italian grocery firm shot six times on the sidewalk, presumably by another Italian, because he had not paid a percentage of the fruits of his own industry to gentlemen who have quite other ideas of what work is. These contrasts are interesting. In London, if one Italian wanted to shoot another one, he would not choose, say, Berkeley Square.

Such contrasts are, perhaps, one of the charms of American life, as the visitor sees it. The "extortionist" incident is—well, just an incident. It does not seem real when a mile or so away I visit a typical country club of the best class: an imposing establishment on the finest scale, with polo ground, riding, golf, tennis, swimming pool, dances, and everything. This retreat, with its fine club house, green lawns, and lady golfers, is all one had been given to understand by the movies that country clubs are.

Still less does it seem true when I visit a country club of another kind: a very small and select place, built on the lines of an old barn, and beautifully done both without and

SOCIETY IN ST. LOUIS

within. Simplicity, most luxuriously and expensively done. This club was recently founded by thirty exclusive members after an exhaustive trial by voting, and will remain the rendezvous of them and their families. The "dues" to a really good country club, by the way, would amount to about as much as the average London professional man would be inclined to regard as a passable income.

And even farther away from the extortionist—though as the crow flies less than a mile—is the dinner-party in one of the many charming residences that lie tucked away in imposing private roads just on the outskirts of St. Louis. . . . St. Louis society at home, and all that you would expect to find in Kensington or, perhaps, for all I know, in Mayfair. The wines at dinner run the usual course. The champagne is of excellent quality, but the conversation is not noticeably on the subject of Prohibition. The hostess knows London and America, and passes much of her time in Paris and London. There might never have been an American Revolution. We are all very much the same.

This is a home, as far as I am able to judge, and a little in despite of all Mr. Sinclair Lewis has taught us, typical of many others in the United States. Every sign of wealth, but all beautifully done. The rug and carpet weavers of far-away Shirvan and Tabriz, by the way, must be grateful for America, tariffs or no tariffs. Everywhere one sees the best examples of their craftsmanship. Every city has its Armenian rug dealers. They are not so plentiful as drug-stores, but they are always to be found. A country that has made Persian rugs so universal is not only doing well, but has learned how to live.

Our host is in finance, but it does not seem to weigh heavily upon him. He is perhaps in the early fifties, and will probably retire in a year or so. Americans, I find, are doing that more and more. The old idea of working until you drop is dying out. The pioneer days are over. More and

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

more Americans seem to be learning to serve both leisure and mammon—and to send mammon packing as soon as it has served its turn sufficiently.

The country club and golf are playing as decisive a part in life as oil, wheat, soda fountains, bootlegging, or the movies. Everywhere one finds golf links, and Americans of all ages playing on them. Golf has ceased to be a pastime, and is now a habit. From the air the transcontinental mail pilots count golf courses by the thousand. Some are so expensive that only men with a minimum of £10,000 a year can hope to join them. But every city of any size has municipal courses where anybody can play. It is a case of a nation having found that, so far as golf interferes with its business, the interference is worth while.

To enter the locker rooms of one of the more imposing country clubs is an impressive experience. One feels all the respect that is inspired by the vaults of a safe-deposit. Every locker contains its treasure: goods more precious than English vintners sell because, although they may not be so good, they cost much more.

America indeed has so much that it pleases me mightily to think that for five shillings I can buy a better bottle of French wine from my London store than a millionaire can hope to obtain in the United States for many times the price—if he can obtain it at all. Perhaps that is why Prohibition really came—a sort of compensation between nations. It may be that Providence inspired Mr. Volstead in the interests of international relations—although if that is true it is equally true that Providence did not realise all that was going to come of it. But no country, even when Providence takes a hand, can expect to have all the advantages.

I think over this as we talk at this pleasant dinner-party. These people would seem to have everything in the world, and as it happens they are the kind of people who have been

SOCIETY IN ST. LOUIS

used to such things for generations. But it is good to find that England and Europe can give them so much that is desirable that they cannot find at home. They may have seen America first, and without exception they are intensely proud of it, though very frank in conversation about some aspects of American life of which they do not approve. But there is a good deal in Europe (and happily quite a lot of it resides in England) which calls insistently to them. Of late years it has become the custom to say that the "Hands Across the Sea" movement is overdone. Perhaps it is true, but the more one sees of America the more one finds people to whom the old racial ties with Britain, whether one generation back or ten, are very dear.

Those of Scots descent let this be known fearlessly. There is some sort of divine ordinance which permits Scotsmen to do this with safety, and even to be applauded for it. Those of merely English descent have to be rather more subdued about it. England is still a word, and an idea, that needs careful handling in the United States. But they feel, I think, just as much.

These people, of course, are not by any means all America. (There are others!) But there are a great many of them only too glad to make the discovery that the home Englishman is not necessarily the Englishman of their tradition, but may very likely be a decent sort of fellow, blessed with a rudimentary sense of humour.

I depart from this pleasant dinner-party in company with a friend, and a negro chauffeur drives us to the station, en route for Kansas City and the West. And although one cannot say of America that murder will out, one can say it of another subject, not less important in the national life. We share a sleeping compartment—and out of my suitcase comes a bottle. It is authentic pre-war rye whisky, as precious as any liquid in all America, and it bears a faded

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

label : " As Served over the Bar of the Sherman House Hotel." Days that are gone. This bottle was presented to me by a noble man in Chicago. I uncork it reverently and carefully as the train sways and roars along through the night. . . . That bottle remains with me for many days. But slowly it grows lighter and lighter.

When at last it is empty it makes the saddest empty I ever saw.

“THE HEART OF AMERICA”

THE TRAIN JERKS to a stop which finally brings me out of that condition of morning torpor which for some of us is the normal slow transition between sleeping and awakening. I pull up the blind of the sleeping berth, look out—and am thrilled into utter wakefulness.

I am looking at nothing more extraordinary than a small station shack. But on it in large letters are the words Kit Carson. Smaller lettering informs me that Kansas City is more than six hundred miles behind, that Denver is a hundred and fifty miles ahead, and that the altitude is something over five thousand feet.

This is really thrilling. Kit Carson, one of the old names of boyhood, perhaps second only to Buffalo Bill ! This tiny township is named after the great plainsman. Here are the plains, where once the buffalo roamed. (There is barbed wire to be seen now.) Here is a monument to one of those men who helped to make an America that never dreamed of the radio, baseball, or big business : an America that had its Bad Men, but was innocent of gunmen.

A tiny place, Kit Carson : a few shacks, a telegraph office, and a store ; but also with a filling station and a garage. Tracks run off over the khaki-coloured earth to the near horizon, leading to God knows where. There is nothing to be seen but Kit Carson. The short brown grass bends before an energetic wind which I feel, by the general pinched look of things, is also a bitter wind.

There are perhaps a dozen motor-cars to be seen, leaning here and there. Their attitude is so negligent that one feels that they are chewing gum. But one almost ceases to notice motor-cars in the United States. They swarm in the big

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

places and spill over into the little ones. They are like feet—everywhere—and just about as noticeable. Some beautiful and glittering, others very badly in need of a shine.

We jerk out of Kit Carson and roll across the prairie. This is the prairie, the famous, romantic prairie! Well, well. A quite good road runs alongside the railway track. Here and there we pass motor-cars on it. Many of them are sedans (or, as England would say, saloons), and inside them are cigar-lighters. Kit Carson, with his long rifle, never thought of these things. . . . Still in pyjamas I think over what I saw in Kansas City, which the night has left over six hundred miles away. I was very tired when I left there, and have had as good a sleep in a train as a man could hope to have.

What would one expect to find in Kansas City? I had not the slightest idea.

I visited it in company with an Anglo-American who knew it as a cow town over forty years ago, and had never seen it since. With him it was something of a sentimental journey, but he had no more idea of what he was going to see than I had. He was even more surprised when we did get there.

No longer a cow town, but a very thriving, modern city, with a population in and around it of over six hundred thousand. Kansas City has 13,169 hotel rooms, 8,922 of which are provided with a bath. This is mentioned in case you ever wish to hold a convention there, which is something that is always happening in America. If you enter a hotel and find it thronged with earnest men all wearing their names in their buttonholes, then you know that up on the twelfth or the seventeenth floor a convention is being held. Fortunately, we found no convention in Kansas City, but a hotel excellent from every point of view. Baths and efficiency, but a pleasant family touch with it.

Kansas City not only calls itself "The Heart of America"

“THE HEART OF AMERICA”

(it is almost the geographical dead centre), but “America’s Most Beautiful City.” This is a touch of hyperbole which need not be taken too seriously in a country where civic pride can become almost a religious ecstasy. There are men in America who would die for their cities, just as there used to be men who would die for a faith. Kansas City presumably bases its claim to surpassing beauty on the development of its suburbs, and one that I explored, known as the Country Club District, is certainly an astonishing example of how a very large estate may be developed for residential purposes. Hundreds of beautiful houses—Spanish, Italian, English, and Colonial in design—and the whole an outstanding example of what real estate can do when animated by real idealism. This idealism, by the way, has to be paid for: £10,000 would be a modest enough price for a home in the best sections of this region.

One met very pleasant people in Kansas City, all very keen on their city’s progress. There is something that stands outside the railway station which may be said to be the embodiment of the city’s desire to make the very best of itself. This is the Liberty Memorial, the main feature of which is a tall column, 280 feet high, rising from the top of a hill. If you approach Kansas City by night you see issuing from this column a flame many feet high. So does Kansas City commemorate its heroes of the Great War.

The money for this memorial, 250,000 dollars, was raised in a week. It was inaugurated by Foch, Beatty, and Pershing. I forget how many of the fallen the memorial records, but it is fair to presume that Kansas City did not lose so many of its men in the war as, say, Folkestone, England. Yet in all the British Empire there is no memorial so majestic as this: not even in London, where our modest Cenotaph stands for the British Empire’s 1,070,000 dead. It was notable, by the way, that the total of British dead is recorded in one of the two halls that flank the monument.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Kansas City wanted a monument to its heroes, and gave the best and most majestic it could build. The memorial honours the fallen, but it also enhances the city. The pillar of fire from the tall column will become famous. So does contemporary Kansas City, the beginning of the old Santa Fé trail, ensure that its history for the future is secured.

Some miles past Kit Carson we pass Hugo, which is exactly the same, but slightly larger. A few miles on we pass Deer Trail, which is exactly like the others, but smaller than either. Deer Trail, indeed, is tiny, but it boasts two garages, a café, and a filling station. More than that, on a very small shack it bears the sign "The Deer Trail Tribune." Here we may see the origin of one of those American newspapers that have grown and grown in size until the Sunday edition weighs just about as much as a Christmas turkey. But the *D.T.T.* I fancy will never live to see itself the proud producer of a comic coloured supplement. Even America has enterprises, and places, that make no progress.

So to Denver and the Rockies. What do they know of Denver who only think of New York? Nothing. And what do we find when we get there? Excellent stores, a skyscraper or two, well laid out streets, very fine parks, pleasant suburbs, a most striking natural-history museum, and every sign of modernity and progress. Everything except the good old roaring days, traces of which a visitor from afar rather wistfully hopes to find.

There are voluminous newspapers in Denver and they reflect the activities of a day which is full enough of sensations. Shootings, hold-ups, and whatnot. But somehow it isn't the same. I would swap one old-time gambler, natty and "heeled" all proper, either for poker or a gentlemanly exchange of shots, against all these modern bandits who prey on drug-store cash registers and petting parties in autos. However, times change.

“THE HEART OF AMERICA”

And let us salute Brown's Palace Hotel. One enters a great square hall and this hall is continued to the roof, eight stories of it, with a noble balustrade right round each floor. A glorious, reckless waste of space. A true caravanserai, with every bedroom opening on to this central hall and every window opening on to the street. If Brown's hotel is allowed to stand indefinitely it should become famous as a national monument. When Queen Marie of Rumania passed by here, Brown's, in the face of stern opposition from something much more modern, secured her. Good old Brown's ! It is the nearest thing to the George and Dragon I saw in America.

Denver, then, Brown's excepted—the hotel being nearly forty years old—is modern. It also stands a mile high, and people who go there to die remain on for decades in the best of health. The city is most salubrious, and is determined to become even more modern. In Denver one almost forgets that one is in Colorado—that evocative name which sounds so wild and romantic from afar. Denver, in a way, is even subduing the Rockies. It has secured splendid natural parks up there—so that some day the realtor will find that there are no more building sites to be had. Even so, one approaches these enclaves of wild nature by means of excellent motor roads. One such road takes you up Lookout Mountain to Buffalo Bill's grave, near which is an attractive log-hut museum devoted to his memory. It is a beautiful spot.

One wonders what sort of shrine it will become to the America of a hundred years hence. There are no limits to what it may come to mean. Chivalry, romance, adventure. . . . Here lies America's Chevalier Bayard, despite the fact that he went round the world with a Wild West Show, so giving me the opportunity of seeing him in partnership with Miss Annie Oakley, otherwise Little Sureshot. I can see her still, shooting down glass balls from horseback. Likewise

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

the attack on the Old Deadwood Coach with Buffalo Bill riding to the rescue.

However, beyond Lookout Mountain rolls range after range of the wild Rockies. Colorado is still Colorado, in places. . . . But I do not find those places, not even at Colorado Springs, fifty or sixty miles away. This is an inland watering-place, very well known and quite charming. It is laid out with spacious streets, and no building is particularly high. I stay in a hotel which might be in Buxton, Harrogate, or Torquay. Behind it rises Pike's Peak, over fourteen thousand feet high. I am told that I cannot be driven to the summit as the motor road is blocked by snow. I receive the news with calm.

Wonderful scenery round Colorado Springs. The Garden of the Gods, for instance—a fantastic region with rose-red rocks of amazing shapes, glowing against a sky of cobalt blue. It is worthily named. One may see Indians here. They sell you curios.

Somebody invites me casually for a mountain motor ride. Knowing nothing of what is coming, I accept. We start up Cheyenne Mountain. The fine motor highway remains a motor highway, but it performs the fantastic feats of a goat track. Up and up—fantastic hairpin bends—up and up. I look down. Good God! I look up! It is worse! It is appalling to think that we are going to drive to the top of this immense cliff. Round and round. The great plain below grows flatter and flatter. So to the plateau and the restaurant and the observation windows on the summit, nearly ten thousand feet. Phew!

Think of it. A millionaire buys a mountain, builds a splendid three-million-dollar motor highway up it, puts up a toll bar, charges motorists a dollar a head—and does well on it! The thing is unbelievable. Yet as I watch the twilight die out on the plain beneath, and Colorado Springs emerge

“THE HEART OF AMERICA”

twinkling, an immense cross of thousands of points of light, I feel that it is worth it.

Except that, having motored up, one has to motor down—and in the dark. Round and round, hairpins by the score, and Eternity calmly waiting below. I try to console myself with the thought that, after this, motoring in Devon should hold no terrors for me.

GOING WEST

HERMETICALLY SEALED, I travel through some fifteen hundred miles of America's finest scenery.

I am sealed within a contrivance of steel and plate-glass, within which are many other people, also sleeping bunks, dining cars, and so on. In short, it is a train, a very long train, on the Denver and Rio Grande Western, which to any reasonable person should be a name to conjure with.

In this immense and sinuous box of steel and glass, warmed by steam, it is quite impossible to get any fresh air. Negro Pullman porters are leagued together to prevent any struggling and stifling Englishman popping his head out of the window. Americans may like the open air, but they like it in its proper place. They cannot stand it indoors.

Thus one passes through the savage heart of the magnificent wilderness breathing an atmosphere only fit for orchids. One plunges through roaring canyons—and feels like a goldfish in a bowl of over-warm water. Nature unfolds herself in her most majestic moods—and one looks out on her from an atmosphere which used to be thought proper for consumptives. The everlasting hills roll by for hundreds and hundreds of miles, but though they are near enough to touch, one might be looking at a coloured photograph.

The odd thing is that, while many individual Americans seem to dislike quite heartily thus being half boiled alive, the mass accepts it with every docility. They are the patient victims of a system—a sort of 18th (Prohibition) Amendment of Hot Air.

I envy the gangmen on the line, groups of whom we pass from time to time dressed in every variety of he-man

GOING WEST

costume. We pass by in the wilderness, but they can feel it, and I can't. I want to cry aloud, "Air, air, for the love of Mike!" I say as much to coloured porters, but it is no use. They don't understand a man who wants air.

There is, of course, the observation platform, but even if one obtains a seat on it, it is not practical to travel day after day on the rear of a train, quite apart from the matter of coal dust which sprays from the belching engine. There is lunch to be thought of, and dinner; also one decides to write letters—and doesn't.

Even if one has a private compartment the problem is not solved. The porter, seeing that he has a desperate case to deal with, opens a window wide and replaces it with a screen of fine mesh to keep out some of the dust. Through this the scenery appears as through smoked glasses. At sixty miles an hour a gale comes in that sweeps the compartment. At high altitudes the air rapidly becomes too cold. One closes the window, pinching one's fingers—and the steam heat soon makes the compartment too hot. The porter swears that the heat is turned off, but there must be a leak somewhere. . . . And so one wanders back along a quarter of a mile of swaying cars to try to find a place on the observation platform.

However, it all passes the time, and whenever we stop at a station I am out as soon as the porter opens the door, to pace the platform and breathe Heaven's air.

A wonderful journey. Pike's Peak is left behind, and through bad lands we go south to Pueblo, to feel our way through the Rockies. Then a right-handed turn and we are heading for the Far West.

Twenty miles or so past Pueblo an amazing sight appears. It is a genuine cowboy, riding along a trail with an escarpment of bare mountain as background. So picturesque does he look that one feels the railway company must arrange for him to ride there as the train passes.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

The long train climbs steadily up into the mountains. Canyon City comes (altitude 5,344 feet). Here is the State penitentiary of Colorado, and this is where four prisoners, hidden up to now, get off. An open motor-truck is waiting and, handcuffed in pairs, the four climb in. One is smoking a cigarette. One is chewing gum. They look very ordinary. Small stuff, a conductor on the train tells me. Stealing automobiles and that sort of thing. The under-sheriff climbs in behind them. I have seen that same sheriff—or twenty like him—on Western films many a time, and am glad to meet him. It is a casual party.

A few moments later we pass the penitentiary. It looks pleasant from the outside, though behind it the bare flank of a mountain serves as one of the prison walls. Nobody could climb it. A large negro is serving water from a spring just outside the prison. He is in for life, having killed another coloured gentleman in a bootlegging brawl. He is a "trusty," and is allowed to serve spring water to tourists, thus making quite a fine income. He waves cheerily and grins to one of the attendants on the train. Things might be worse with him.

There comes the great moment when we roll through the Royal Gorge of the Arkansas, the deepest canyon through which any railway runs. For ten blessed minutes the train stops so that we may alight to admire the view. There is air as well as majesty. The red granite cliffs are said to rise to a height of nearly three thousand feet. It is difficult to believe that they are so high as this. But as a canyon it is a very real one.

So through the long day. Mountains and canyons, gulches and rivers, with the scenic attendant in the dining-car telling us all about it. We climb steadily up to the Tennessee Pass, which is over ten thousand feet high—the Continental Divide. We are on the Pacific Slope.

Late that evening the scenic attendant invites us into the observation car, where the lights are turned out. We

GOING WEST

are passing through the splendid Canyon of the Colorado River, sixteen miles of magnificent scenery faintly lit by a moon hanging somewhere behind one of the peaks. It seems to be the perfection of all that canyons should be, and through it runs that same river which many hundreds of miles away flows through the Grand Canyon, the world's greatest natural marvel. It is tantalising not to be able to see more of what we are passing through.

So into the night. I lie on a shelf, a broad comfortable shelf, supplied with pillows, mattress, and the rest, within this flying box of steel and glass, and I realise vividly that through the hours of darkness we are repeating what we have been doing all day—roaring through canyons, beneath the towering peaks of mountains, over bridges and turbulent streams, the searchlight on the great engine picking out its way along the twisting path through these tumbling ranges. The grade is mostly downwards now, and we travel rapidly, swaying. One lies, a tiny helpless person, absurdly clad in pyjamas. Suppose the searchlight missed its way! . . . There is a lot to think about, if the mind is foolish enough to dwell on it.

Some time in the night we slip from Colorado into Utah, and towards noon run into Salt Lake City. Why, I do not quite know, but this has always been one of the names on the United States map which has most attracted me. No doubt the name of Brigham Young is responsible for this, and the rather shuddery mysteries of the Mormons. Perhaps, secretly, we are all a little envious of Brigham Young. What an experience—say, for a novelist—to have had nineteen wives, and many lady friends!

A railway official tells me that by a fortunate chance there are three-quarters of an hour available. One can see a lot in that time. The man who whistles up a handsome taxi for me was born in Kent, has lived in Salt Lake City over thirty years, and likes it. The driver has the gift of eloquence,

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

and turning round to talk—most driver-guides do this in America, and it is rather worrying to a motorist who believes in keeping his eye on the road—explains the city as we go along.

It is very well laid out, with broad avenues. In its late autumn foliage it has rather a wistful air. Since I was not proposing to inquire deeply into the history of Mormonism, I realise that three-quarters of an hour will do. We see the Temple, the Tabernacle, and the Assembly Hall. We pass the little private cemetery where Brigham Young is buried, lying close to three wives, two children, and one mother-in-law. The guide points out grimly that there is a three-ton block of stone on the grave of the mother-in-law. The suggestion is that even after death Brigham Young, so well versed in the ways of women, was taking no chances.

The State Capitol is by far the most impressive sight. A fine building, with its great dome. The front façade faces the city. The rear looks out on to a stark mountain range, rising close at hand. Front door in civilisation. Back door in the wilderness. I am delivered at the station with five minutes to spare. Price of drive and lecture two dollars. Imagine seeing Salt Lake City and hearing all about it for two dollars!

The Southern Pacific takes us in charge and we proceed to Ogden, Utah's second city. Outside the station a photographer has a large tripod camera pointed down the wide main street, which is closed by a high mountain over which mist is swirling. It seems a very patient business. I learn after a time that he is doing this for the picture-postcard industry. Since the last photo of Ogden was made a new hotel has risen on the skyline which puts previous records out of date. So this photographer has come all the way from Salt Lake City to take another view. The mist clears slightly, he takes his view, and the new hotel is given to fame. The artists will make up any deficiencies, he explains. One learns.

GOING WEST

So to what in some ways is the most fascinating section of this wonderful scenic voyage half across a continent.

For thirty miles the railway runs on trestles across the mysterious waters of Great Salt Lake. The water is a pearly blue. Nothing lives in it, except a tiny shrimp. One cannot see any shrimps, but on the water are many fat little birds of the water-hen type. They look supremely happy and I am told make excellent eating. To the north and west of us are high mountains, softened by a pearly haze. It is the only time I have ever had—or am ever likely to have—an excellent lunch while looking out right and left on the Great Salt Lake. It is an experience one very thoroughly appreciates. The Southern Pacific calls it “Going to Sea by Rail,” a pretty idea.

We enter on the Nevada desert! The beauty of that desert in the afternoon, the soft colours of rock and sand, sky and mountain! Veteran travellers in these regions tell me that you soon get tired of looking on deserts. They may be right, but I think it would take a long time. Nevada, with an area of 109,000 square miles, has a population of only 77,407. They talk, of course, of irrigation, and some day no doubt this astonishing people will try to make this desert fruitful, as they have done others. I find no desire to wish them success in any such enterprise. The deserts are much too beautiful to be spoiled by mere crops. America should cherish her wild spaces. In some of her city parks you will see the sign “Keep Off.” I should like to lay the foundation stone of an immense sign bearing that legend on the Nevada desert.

It was annoying to pass Reno in the dark—romantic Reno, where the chief industry is divorce, and which I was told is quite a charming little place. But you can't have everything, and there was lots more to come—California, the beautiful Sierra Nevada range, and so on to San Francisco, one of the most ringing names of all.

AND SO TO SAN FRANCISCO

AND SO TO SAN FRANCISCO.

I had never dreamed that a few miles short of that goal the long trans-continental train would most efficiently split itself up and stow itself on a huge train ferry, and that a few minutes later the passengers from New York, Chicago, St. Louis, and the rest would be further transferred to a real ferry-boat, and so end their land journey as seafarers. But so it is, and it has the advantage that, though from the east you do not come sailing in through the Golden Gate, you do all the same approach San Francisco by water.

A great name. Its history, as Europe measures these things, is small enough. In 1579 Sir Francis Drake just missed discovering it, which in some ways is perhaps a pity, although in that case it would not have had the name it now bears, and California would not have been full of Spanish architecture. In 1769 the Spaniards did discover it—or rather the bay that is entered by the Golden Gate—and so gave us a name that means much to sailors the world over.

That was the beginning. Add to it the history of the gold-rush—the days of the forty-niners—Bret Harte, the great earthquake and fire of 1906, and a few other ingredients, and you have most of San Francisco's history. But somehow it has a background immensely deeper than its years warrant. San Francisco may push its skyscrapers into the future, but you feel that it has its basements deep in history—even though most of them date from only 1906.

All over the United States there is a legend that in San Francisco you must never mention the word "earthquake."

AND SO TO SAN FRANCISCO

New York and Chicago will impress this on you with a chuckle. The great catastrophe of 1906, you are told, is supposed by all good San Franciscans to have happened entirely by the agency of fire: an interesting example of a whole city hypnotising itself, as it were, into the belief that the earth is flat. But arrival at San Francisco soon proves that this is a libel on the inhabitants. They freely admit that there was an earthquake in 1906. You may hear thrilling stories of it even to this day.

But what San Francisco is really touchy about is that word 'Frisco. The stranger may think that there is a certain rollicking attractiveness in referring to this great city by the sea by a fo'c'sle sort of name. But San Francisco doesn't desire to be so labelled. It is a social *gaffe* to say 'Frisco, however romantically it may suggest brassbound chests and green parrots. "Do you," said a resident to me, "expect London to be called Lon?" One cannot reply to an argument like that!

Looking from my usual fifteenth-story bedroom window the view is very reminiscent of New York—though very different. Just as New York is crowded on its rocky island, so is San Francisco confined to its hilly peninsula. It is the second—or perhaps, counting Chicago, the third—most imposing cluster of skyscrapers on the continent. And though Sir Francis Drake overlooked what was to be San Francisco, there is a hotel flag bearing his name flying from the summit of something like forty stories.

It is amazing to look on all this and realise that not a stone in view was in place in 1906. All these imposing business offices, apartment houses, hotels and the rest, have been built within the past twenty years. It had been my privilege to spend much of my time coming across the continent with a San Francisco citizen, who was as proud of his city as a good father is of twins. He was in the thick of the earthquake and the fire, and has since seen the city

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

rise from its ashes to what it is now. His devotion had something of ecstasy. And looking on this product of twenty years' energy and faith in the future—not to mention faith in their architects—one can quite understand such intense civic pride.

All the way across the continent this resident of San Francisco, who rapidly ceased to be an acquaintance and became a friend, said to me earnestly, but with a saving twinkle in his eye, whenever we were looking at a landscape, "I want to tell you, this is nothing. You wait until we get to California." He was behaving like all true children of California, "knocking" all the rest of America in favour of the State he loved so much. The rest of the United States accepts this amiable weakness with only moderate patience.

Yet, looking back on the United States in some perspective, one can quite understand the pride of Californians. Their own state has much about it that does not exist elsewhere, and is definitely attractive in many ways. And when a son of San Francisco praises California he is not by any chance including Los Angeles in his testimonial. San Franciscans "knock" Los Angeles more fiercely than do any other Americans. They deride even its famous perpetual sunshine, and exalt their own sea mists and equable temperature. They think San Francisco is, quite simply, a marvellous city. And there is much to be said for their opinion. Nature has done a tremendous amount for it. And as far as his decoration of the site is concerned man has done very well and audaciously. Only in politics and a few other details has he proved unworthy of his trust.

But what San Francisco really is like as a city had best be found out from the local literature. All United States cities have their own beautifully produced illustrated booklets, gracefully bestowed on the visitor by a proud Chamber of Commerce. The city is there for everybody to see who

AND SO TO SAN FRANCISCO

travels far enough, and the local literature is there for anybody to read.

What matters most, even in a city like San Francisco, are the things one finds out for oneself.

My barber, for instance. It is Sunday morning, but despite that, this sanitary palace in the basement of the hotel is full of customers, with hot towels, massaging, haircutting, shoe shining (while your hair is being cut), and pretty manicurists all in full cry.

So it is wherever you go in America, by the way. People are working at all times of the day and night. Nobody seems to regard work as a curse in the United States. Some people even seem to like it.

My barber, then, hails from Scotland, but has been for over twenty years in America. When he left New York two years before to look for a new job out West he drove across the continent in his own car. He tells me much about conditions in his own industry. Apparently a good man can make from £600 to £1,000 a year quite easily. If he doesn't like one job he just walks out and gets another.

My modest hair-cut, singe, and shampoo costs me two dollars and sixty cents, or about eleven shillings. I am a little vague as to why it should have been so expensive. But this and the fact that, acting on the soundest advice, I make my tip half a dollar, helps one to understand why there is so much prosperity in the hairdresser's saloon.

From another source I learn that these beautifully manicured manicurists are not so demure as their elaborately arched eyebrows suggest. It is whispered to me that they sometimes tell their regular customers the latest story. "Heard any new ones, Maisie?" One can readily understand what a boon it is to the tired business man who, while hot towels cover his upturned face and Maisie attends to his hands, can hear something which brings laughter from fellow-members at his club a little later. I was glad to hear

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

it, because some of these manicurists are such wonderful works of art that one feels they must be above ordinary human reactions. . . . I felt that some day I really must get in touch with one.

Then there is the amiable police-sergeant whom I happen to encounter on a friendly footing. He mentions that some time ago he thought his wife ought to know Europe. He accordingly sent her there for a six months' trip.

This, I think, is what may be called thinking big. Police-sergeants in England do not run to such conceptions of what ought to be done to a wife. (Perhaps we had better not inquire too closely where the money came from !)

"Did she like it?" I asked.

"I'll say she did. She thought London was fine."

Everywhere I found Americans, of all kinds, who think that London is fine. Accustomed as English people are to finding London always there, and always looking very much the same, we may sometimes wonder what Americans find in it that is so attractive. But Americans don't feel that way about it. As they put it, they get a "real kick" out of London. They get many kicks, kicks all over the place, where we should never dream they existed. And the more one sees of American life the more one realises why quiet old London, sober, historic, charming, and unsensational, exerts so powerful an appeal. I learned to know London much better in America.

It was another police-official I talked with who mentioned that the previous year he had visited Paris with the American Legion. He afterwards spent eight days in London. On eight mornings he went to see the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace. His comments on that historic daily ceremony moved me sentimentally. I like to think of that smart American policeman keeping his enthusiastic vigil morning after morning, while a few hundred yards away in

AND SO TO SAN FRANCISCO

Piccadilly and the Strand passed the myriads of Londoners who are not even aware that the palace has a guard that is changed every morning. . . . In short, one has to come to San Francisco to learn what London really ought to feel like to those who live in it.

Having seen other American cities, it was not surprising to find that San Francisco has its own beautiful parks and suburbs, its profusion of charming villas, its country clubs and the rest. What was new was the city's Chinatown. We have all heard of that. From afar it suggests mystery, drama, romance. Close at hand it looks severely respectable. We must remember that this part of the city also is only twenty years old, or less. But I have not the slightest doubt that all the factors that go to the making of magazine stories and the movies exist in San Francisco's Chinatown, if one liked to look for them closely enough. All the ingredients of drama ~~slumber~~ there, including that of tong warfare. . . . And in the streets one may see Chinese flappers beautifully arrayed, and quite often beautiful in themselves. One may, indeed, see Anna May Wongs on street cars.

What I see of Chinatown is in the company of a Chinese lady doctor, born in America. It is a short visit, but very interesting. Among other places we visit the Chinese theatre, a large place full of Chinese, many of them young men in what may be described as smart Western attire. . . .

A company that has come all the way from Peking is playing. It may be a drama, it may be opera, it may be a musical comedy, for all I know. Anyhow, three young men seated to the left of the stage keep up an immense clatter with every variety of percussion contrivance. The property man in his shirt sleeves wanders in and out of the action. An actor wearing a long and narrow white beard is stabbed. He takes his time about dying. As he finally stretches himself out, the property man, who is chewing gum, places a small

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

wooden pillow under his head. For one brief moment the corpse consents to remain there. Then he rises and the property man nonchalantly drops an unconvincing dummy in his place. It is good luck thus to pop in on a Chinese drama and to encounter almost at once this typical example of Celestial stage convention. . . . Real China, five minutes from Union Square.

Whatever San Francisco does it insists on doing well—and rather better, of course, than any other part of the United States. A visit to its Bohemian Club staggers the wandering bohemian. All is so large and magnificent. These bohemians are nowhere near the starvation line, and all of them have more than one shot in their lockers. (Some keep it by the case.) Talent in profusion, and a magnificent bar that one feels would melt the heart of even the late Mr. Volstead. . . . It is kept just as it was and, so happy is the atmosphere, one has at times the illusion that nothing has changed! There is nothing like good spirits!

Last scene of all, a Saturday night dinner out at the country headquarters of a very well-known circle of good cheer, the Family Club. Log fires, cocktails, wine. There are visitors, and dinner is one long run of laughter owing to the exertions of the chairman, who is a notorious wit and revels in his sinister reputation. Never once does he miss fire. He is ably seconded by another member, who tries to disrupt dinner by appearing as a rude old German waiter. Both these men should be actors. Instead they are in plain business, and have offices and card-indexes high up in skyscrapers.

From the fun of dinner we pass out in the night to a clearing in a redwood grove. These redwood trees are said by Californians to be the oldest living things in the world. Straight as pines they tower upwards some two hundred feet or more. Against a semicircle of these trees a log stage

AND SO TO SAN FRANCISCO

is built. A member mounts it and then, while coloured fires burst out at concealed points here and there in the redwood grove, he delivers himself of a glowing ritualistic oration which is a call to man to love his fellow-men—to love Nature, truth, beauty, love, the Universe, everything. A little over-coloured, this oration, a little like Ella Wheeler Wilcox in ecstasy. It has allusions to everything that is beautiful, and must have taken a great deal of compiling. It is charged with the most exalted sentiments, uplift at its highest. . . . Yet it is a very impressive moment. Silently we stand beneath the towering trees, straight as steel masts, while the red fires glow in the grove. It was a great surprise, an undeniably beautiful ceremony, even though one did not quite realise what it was all about, and perhaps the most interesting moment I had yet encountered in this country of violent contrasts.

Undoubtedly this City of the Golden Gate is one that remains vividly in the memory long after you leave it. It has a character of its own—its perilously steep streets would give it that, if nothing else did. There is charm both in the city so picturesquely set on its great bay and in the country round about. One can quite understand how it is that its citizens are so proud of all they have accomplished in the past twenty years.

But despite its interest and colour, no place for the mere visitor just to sit and think. Nowhere to take a glass of wine, or a quiet reflective glass of beer. Only the hotel lobbies or the places where you go to eat. Prohibition in a way has made American cities ghosts of cities. They have no historic past to feed the mind, and this lack of hospitality, which the stranger may purchase for himself—the hospitality the stranger needs just as much as entertainment by kind acquaintances—means that there is nothing for him to look at but the streets.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

And modern American streets are all very much the same, and soon become very tiresome, however high the buildings, however brisk the traffic.

A country of ten million automobiles, of ten thousand religions, and not a single inn !

THE CITY OF ROMANCE

WITHIN RECENT TIMES there was apparently quite a prospect that, should there ever be another war, it would be between San Francisco and Los Angeles. That acute phase has fortunately passed, but while it lasted it was an interesting—and typical—chapter of American history.

Though separated by five hundred miles of country, most of it sparsely inhabited and the greater portion of it mountains, these two cities of the Pacific coast for a considerable time waged a sort of guerrilla campaign of jealousy.

San Francisco had history, and regarded Los Angeles as an upstart. Los Angeles had area, and didn't mind being regarded as a parvenu, because it knew it could deliver the goods. If San Francisco could have enfolded to its bosom the near-by cities that lie round its bay, Oakland, Berkeley, and the rest, then the guerrilla warfare might have developed into something more serious. As it is, San Francisco prefers not to talk about population when a Los Angeles man is about.

But a San Francisco native loves you if you tell him you prefer his city to the other, and a son of Los Angeles, adopted or otherwise, feels you are his brother if you say what he is waiting to hear. With a certain amount of tact one may fairly easily achieve a considerable popularity on the Pacific coast. And, anyhow, they're all very glad to see you. It is a very welcoming country, California.

The first surprise Los Angeles gives is its immense area. Its distances are tremendous. A ride that stretches (in London) from Hammersmith to the Bank is a very small taxi trip in Los Angeles. At night there are vistas of street lamps along its boulevards, finished and unfinished, that

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

stretch away to unimagined distances. London's Cromwell Road is a mere cul-de-sac to them. Los Angeles is rapidly approaching the million and a half mark of population, and is growing and growing. It can't evoke any great figures of the past, but its history in real estate has been fantastic. And all done in the last twenty-five years.

Thus San Francisco has long ago given up the fight for population. It knows when it is beaten, and wisely adopts the air of a dignified old gentleman, looking on with faint amusement at this swelling young fellow in the south who admits no limits to his growth. I forget how many square miles the city has staked out for itself, but the area seems to be roughly that of all Devonshire. Before so very many years Los Angeles expects to see, say, five million people within it.

Ten or fifteen miles from the centre one finds large areas with nothing on them, but with roads and side streets already laid out. At night, regardless of expense, rows of electric-light standards brilliantly illuminate these empty spaces. Some day the tide of population will come creeping into them, bringing villas, stores, filling stations, Piggly-Wiggly shops, and another two hundred thousand autos. So does progress push along.

South from San Francisco the Southern Pacific express bustles along on its twelve-hour journey to Los Angeles, through country that is a surprise to English eyes. The surprise is the lack of greenery. In England, I think, everyone regards California as one huge garden. That, no doubt, is absurd, but we have been so accustomed to hearing of its glories that inevitably we think of it in terms of our own countryside. Probably this is another victory for advertising.

Here and there we pass broad valleys carpeted with orchards which are described to me as being very rich

THE CITY OF ROMANCE

areas, bringing forth more wealth than ever was dreamed of in the old gold-rush days. This is the result of human enterprise, California sun, and irrigation. But even here the green of England is missing. California has much beauty, but it does not possess it all. No doubt it would be nearer the perfection it claims if it had a little less of its own perfect climate and a little more of England's imperfect weather.

For the most part the journey consists of mountains, bare and brown. In spring, I am told, these mountains are all beautifully green, with a profusion of wild flowers everywhere. I am also told that it is a transient greenness, lasting a month or so. One begins to realise how important a factor is rain.

But California, we must remember, is a thousand miles long from north to south, and within its vast expanse lie arid deserts, rapidly being discovered by tourists, and great ranges of mountains. If, say, half of England were put down in California, it would look like a very large oasis, amazingly green, strangely short of palms, but notable for its profusion of splendid trees. Apart from the redwoods I saw near San Francisco, which were only modest two-hundred-foot members of their great family, I did not see a really noble tree in America. (It is true I did not visit the States of Oregon and Washington, where, one understands, the pine forests are very fine. . . .) Here is something that never occurs to English people—that they live in a country of magnificent timber.

The observation platform on this train is unusually large, the length of half a car, holding some forty people. It is November, but the sky is a cobalt blue and the sun is hot. We sit and watch the long panorama of the mountains. After a time the slight little woman sitting on the next chair makes some remark about the scenery, and conversation opens. In England one might regard this as an advance.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

In America it apparently means nothing, although my neighbour is by no means unattractive, in a quiet way.

I soon realise that she badly wants to talk to somebody. Before long I possess a brief history of her life. Years ago she divorced her husband. (This again means nothing.) Since then she has lived for her son, and they were the very best of friends—"just brother and sister." She saw him through college and well started in life. Then three weeks before he had gone out hunting (what England calls shooting) with a friend, looking for small birds. The friend stumbles, and the son of my train acquaintance was shot in the back of the head and killed. After a fortnight's absence from Los Angeles, going round California with a brother who is a "drummer," she is now going back to her lonely little home in Los Angeles, wondering whether she will ever be able to settle down there again.

"If I only had the money I'd just travel all the time," she says.

Learning that I come from London she says eagerly that her son once went there. He worked his way through the Panama Canal on a freighter, just for fun, with a friend; spent a whole day and night in London. She remembers even the hotel he stopped at.

Talking thus to individual Americans one realises how very human they are. No language difficulty. (That rather naïve but very important thought is always bobbing up in the mind.) One thinks of a nation as different, and the individuals persist in being remarkably and disconcertingly the same. This stricken mother produces a photograph of her hero, and he appears to be—or have been—all that she says of him. There is nothing to be done except sympathise.

And here at last is Los Angeles, where Hollywood and romance are.

THE CITY OF ROMANCE

The world in general is inclined to think that Los Angeles is just Hollywood. Los Angeles vigorously dissents.

Hollywood, on the other hand, affects to ignore the parent city, and the occasions are rare when the stars of the film world are to be seen "down town." I have heard it said by the owners of names familiar round the world that "I don't go down to Los Angeles once in three months." They live with their art, away up near Hollywood Boulevard, where tourists arrive from all over the United States to look upon their idols, male and female.

Without being precisely jealous of its own famous suburb, Los Angeles is all the same slightly annoyed that people overlook the major in favour of the minor. Years ago, when buying something in a shop in Dorchester, I mentioned the name of a famous resident of the old town. "Mr. Thomas Hardy," said the shopkeeper. "We think nothing of him here. You can see him walking up the High Street any morning." Los Angeles feels a little that way about the princes and princesses of the screen.

There are millionaires in Los Angeles who have never been on a "lot," except of the kind familiar to real estate agents. Some twenty miles away on the coast Los Angeles has its port, which now surpasses San Francisco in tonnage. On the fringes of the city are forests of oil derricks, tapping the stored wealth that lies below. Every family in the city possesses one-and-a-fraction of motor-cars. Los Angeles would like these things known.

Yet celebrities of all degrees and countries disembark at Los Angeles and, ignoring the really imposing city hall, scuttle off on a bee-line for Hollywood. This lure of the films seems to be universal, to lurk in every breast. Men and women, prince and artist, all fall for it. It must be that thirst for romance which lies within us all, and which everybody who can seeks to assuage by visiting the fabled springs of Hollywood. . . . Whether any of them ever quaff

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

precisely the kind of draught they are looking for is another matter. I doubt it.

Not so long ago a famous British political figure was in these parts. He was invited to visit the Huntington Library and Art Gallery, which lies out near Pasadena, most beautiful of suburban cities. He replied that he very much regretted that the time at his disposal did not permit, or words to that effect. Yet he found time to visit the home of a famous film star, which is a sort of local Mecca for the great.

Los Angeles, observing this sort of thing, realises that even wealth, progress, and the glory of go-getting in a perfect climate, do not bring quite all the happiness they should. What is the use of being an example to the world of rapid civic expansion, if people who ought to know better arrive there and run round after a lot of movie stars?

Unlike my famous compatriot, I visited the Huntington collection. The late Henry E. Huntington, a street-railway millionaire, has done for this part of the world what Sir Richard Wallace did for London. The gallery had then been open less than a year. So many people want to visit it that it all has to be done by ticket, many weeks ahead. Every visitor arrives by motor-car, usually an expensive one.

It is here that Gainsborough's "Blue Boy" will be seen for all time, also Lawrence's almost equally famous "Pinkie." The collection of the British eighteenth-century school is magnificent. It was strange to meet these familiar faces and costumes seven thousand miles from London. At first I felt no animus against Mr. Huntington for having acquired them. It was good and gratifying to see English culture of the days of sedan chairs shedding its gracious light in a far-away country where the bricklayer goes to work in a sedan automobile.

One felt that there could never possibly be any more serious misunderstandings between the two countries, with such links to bind us. . . . And then I met Jane, Countess

THE CITY OF ROMANCE

of Harrington, as painted by Sir Joshua, in her glorious salmon robes, and fell in love with her. She ought never to have been allowed to leave home, and I felt that she, whose natural background is a serene English park, must feel very much an exile in this sunny land where palm trees rustle and grass is only green by kind permission of the water company. If I knew any way of stealing her and taking her back home I would go to it.

Helen once started a war. Jane is sweet enough to start another. . . . But on second thoughts I think it would be well to let the matter drop. Jane looks very well where she is, and if ever Hollywood wants to see how clothes in the later eighteenth century should be worn, well, there she is, always waiting with her sweet smile.

There are so many impressions of Los Angeles that one hardly knows where to pick next. There is, for instance, a city graft scandal of considerable magnitude unrolling itself in the courts. A legal officer of high standing has just been arrested, along with a number of gentlemen very Semitically named who are mostly tailors. Apparently various people who ought to have gone to prison about something else, didn't, and so now the legions of purity are getting busy. But it all passes only as a sort of faint rumour in the multiple life of the city, and moreover it is very complicated. Perhaps we had better leave it alone.

Out at the great stadium there is something more easy to understand—a "football game" between two universities. It is one of the greatest athletic events of the year and eighty-five thousand people are present. Everything one has ever learned about American college football, from the films or elsewhere, is here to be seen; the gaudy students' brass bands of the opposing teams, the organised "rooting" of the college cheerers, the frantic enthusiasm. Every now and again, in some climax of the game, the squeals of feminine

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

supporters pierce the din, like the sudden uncontrollable shriek of intense physical agony. It is all very wonderful, and very well worth coming to see. To the rival supporters every moment of the hotly contested game is a crisis, and final defeat, for those who have to suffer it, is a disaster.

There is a sequel later, at one of the big and luxurious hotels "down town." Up to midnight the magnificent underground ballroom, a recently built source of pride, is packed with students, youths and girls, and their parties. There are bottles on many of the tables which contain more than was dreamt of in the philosophy of the Eighteenth Amendment—mostly bath-tub gin. The fun would be very fast and furious were it not that the dance floor is a jam.

In this gathering I notice many exceptionally pretty girls. Here and there is a real beauty. The average of mere prettiness runs very high. A film director would find something worth while once every minute. Miss America, considerably excited, is looking her very best.

At somewhere about one o'clock the fun really begins. In many hundreds of hotel rooms parties are now being held. In the corridors are many young men most patently intoxicated, and some girls not much less so. From every window overlooking the various hotel courtyards figures appear and shout college cries of defiance: the lusty voices of young men, the shriller voices of girls. The co-eds are fighting the "football game" over once again.

I saw a similar scene at a Chicago hotel, but here the pace is much hotter. It becomes a riot. The rain of soda-water bottles begins, and for hours it goes on, down into the courtyards. All sorts of other missiles go the same way, waiters' trays being a favourite. Through this window and that, one may see slight but beautiful forms in pretty frocks and in negligent attitudes, on beds, in arm-chairs, smoking, laughing, quaffing. A sort of studio party in every bedroom. And such a din!

THE CITY OF ROMANCE

This is not just a jollification. It is an orgy, and what was in full swing just after midnight is going on with undiminished fury at four in the morning. A young man, more than half drunk and wholly frantic, is rushing up and down the corridors looking for his sweetie. Behind one of these innumerable bedroom doors, on one or other of these many floors, she is in hiding with some other young man. Perhaps, half drunk herself, she is in his arms. The frantic young man hammers on various doors, and is admitted, only to be thrown out. And off he rushes, to try to find some clue to the whereabouts of his adored one. . . . This is drama, in its way.

I speculate on what might happen to some trusting stranger who, stimulated by the prevailing good-cheer of the occasion, tried to join in, and make up to some pretty Miss America. He would probably be lynched by infuriated college boys.

It isn't any use going to bed. . . . Sitting at my window on the ninth floor I realise that certain young men on the twelfth are making me a target for soda-water bottles. This is more dangerous than American football. I retire a little from the window, but I can still see scraps of a dozen or more bedroom parties. And for me it is all a deepening of the great primary mystery concerning American women. The world, despite the profusion of divorces in the United States, is taught to believe that American women are uncommonly virtuous. Anything else you like—but not that! Can it be possible for the women of one great nation to be in this respect entirely different from the women of all others? Is there something in the American air which makes virtue in these latitudes more natural than in any others? One doubts it. And many American men, who individually suffer from none of the nationally made self-deception in such matters, assure me that American women are like their sisters everywhere else, and that virtue is not an American

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

monopoly. They will go farther and say that their women are prepared to do just what they please, and that many of the co-eds at the colleges learn a great deal more than they ought to do—especially since Prohibition has brought the flavour of synthetic gin into petting parties.

One is told, even, that the Mrs. Dodsworth of Sinclair Lewis does not merely live in fiction ; that there are plenty of Mrs. Dodsworths about—calm, self-reliant, efficient, masterful and fifty-fifty, even in their amours. It may be so, but I was not fortunate enough to be able to study any Mrs. Dodsworths.

I would have given a great deal to have had the frank confessions of some of those charming Miss Americas as to what really happened in those bedroom gatherings :

Tell me, Miss America,
Just how far does petting go ?

But I had to leave America without this question being satisfactorily answered, and for me the mystery remains of what is the product, emotionally expressed, of the union of a charming co-ed and synthetic gin.

It is the first night of a new talking film at the Carthay Circle Theatre, Hollywood. I am utterly vague as to where in the city's immensity the theatre lies, but the driver of the Yellow taxi cab has no doubt about it, and streaks along for mile after mile.

We arrive, and the scene is impressive. There is fog in the soft Californian air, and it is the only familiar touch to English eyes. There is a traffic block as we approach the theatre, standing in a wide boulevard, and we have to wait. Immense studio projectors are plentifully scattered about, casting their beams in all directions, overcoming the fog, which is of just sufficient density to be worth mentioning in a London news item on the weather. Some of these

THE CITY OF ROMANCE

projectors have coloured glass over them, which gives strange effects. In fact, for the moment I am under the impression that California grows pink and blue trees. Having dined well, and not strictly according to law, this first effect is slightly alarming.

A great crowd before the theatre. "Fans" are here, several thousands of them, the majority girls, but papas and mamas among them. They are lined up to see the stars go in. Los Angeles may be used to the idea of film celebrities, but a gathering such as this brings out the enthusiasts.

Such an affair as this, I suppose, must be regarded in Los Angeles as a social event of the very first importance. . . . And for the matter of that, so it would be in London. Infinitely more so. We have seen there great crowds for one film star. What might happen if, as on this occasion, they were to be counted by the dozen? For that large section of the world which places the movies first in its regard, this event would be looked upon as the very summit of thrilling experience.

Having alighted, we become aware that, standing at the beginning of the long canvas awning that suggests a London wedding, is a microphone, in charge of a genial gentleman in evening dress. As each film celebrity arrives, to the accompaniment of cries of welcome from the crowd, he or she "goes on the air" for a brief moment and says a few words of greeting to all America.

My taxi companion is an English baronet, plump, kindly, and self-effacing. I urge him to play his part.

"Say a few words. They'd love it."

"Good God, no! I wouldn't think of it!"

We are slowly approaching the microphone.

"Go on. Be a Bart.! Go on the air! Let me tell them who you are."

He is in terror.

"Great Scott! If you do . . .!"

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

He drags me hurriedly past the danger point, and really feels that he has had a narrow escape. Only then do I realise that I have missed a great chance for myself. I could have pretended for a moment to be a celebrity, and mentioned the matter to all America. . . . The man who neglects such a chance of advertisement simply doesn't know how to live.

Into the thronged foyer. Everybody is in evening dress. Everything is very brilliant. Many of the women beautifully gowned. The girl ushers, painted as no courtesan would dare to be, are in rich and fantastic costumes. There is everything that the heart of man could desire, except a bar. Here and there I am able to greet film stars whom I have already had the thrill of meeting. John Barrymore, for instance. (Not all film stars are beautiful women.)

There is an immense orchestra, big enough for an opera house. The curtain goes up on my first "talkie." I have had many first-night thrills, but this is a new one.

The shadows come and go on the screen. They are the familiar shadows we have known for so long, but with the odd and at first uncanny difference that they emit speech. Very sonorous speech. From out of a body that has no thickness comes a voice that most of the time has far too much. . . . Another scientific marvel, which in no time will become perfected, and a commonplace. It is done, and once such things are done nowadays we very soon cease to wonder about them.

An extraordinary place is this Hollywood, Los Angeles, California. Nothing I had ever read about it had really prepared me for it. No doubt this will be equally inadequate for anybody else. I'm afraid it can't be done. Hollywood, so to speak, baffles description.

We have had so much intensive preparation about it—we of the outside world who, for ten years, have heard

THE CITY OF ROMANCE

about Hollywood, seen photographs of its beautiful stars read about its fantastic salaries and of the fabulous sums spent on pictures. To many it stands for Paradise. Without being one of these, I will admit that I had long been very much interested.

Can it be that even Paradise, on closer acquaintance, would be not quite what we thought it? Not that Hollywood is entirely disappointing. But it is a startling proof of what may be accepted as the principle that no place is ever in any way like one's preconceptions of it.

It eludes one; refuses to stand still and be photographed. The principle reason, I think, is the simple one that it, and everything about it, covers so much ground. To know and feel a place, in a short time, you must be able to walk about it, to be with it in the streets. And you can't walk about half a county. At Hollywood you must forever be in a motor-car, flying from place to place. An invitation to dinner may easily mean a trot of forty miles, there and back. The dinner will almost certainly be worth it.

Hollywood is romantically set. It lies at the very foot of mountains, and up their nearer slopes are dotted villa residences, such as one sees on the Riviera. There are beautiful residential districts, with palm-lined avenues, where the grass is as green as an English college lawn. The sky is blue, most of the time, the sunshine golden. The women are smart, the film stars, of course, are beautiful, or quite often so, and few women, whether of the screen or otherwise, hesitate to apply art profusely, whether or not it is needed. In short, they are bedizened. Everything is very pleasant and alluring.

And yet to the stranger there is a something lacking. I think that, to the European, it is flavour, taste. Hollywood and all about it is so new—the newest thing in America—that it hasn't had time to accumulate any flavours. It is full of nice new streets, but it hasn't got a dark alley. Down

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

on the coast, ten miles or so away, the Pacific rollers come ceaselessly in, but throw up no salt smell of the sea. It is that same rough and bracing tang which is missing in this great city of Los-Angeles-Hollywood, planted in a soft and languorous climate. . . . And the palate learns to yearn for the sharp impact of a plain bottle of English beer, preferably from a tankard.

All the same, many people there insist that if you stay long enough you will never want to go away. And since Los Angeles is peopled almost entirely by settlers from elsewhere, they may be right—given long enough.

From my hotel windows I look over green lawns, across a spacious boulevard, and beyond to the range of hills that rises behind Hollywood. The sky is blue, the colouring charming.

But hidden in the green lawns that surround the hotel, and in those of beautiful Beverly Hills and Pasadena, there is a secret. Each one carries within its bosom many concealed water sprinklers. Nature has provided the real estate, but man has to find the water. That comes all the way from Owens River, some hundreds of miles away. Only by constant make-up, so to speak, is this brilliant verdant complexion sustained. Some cities are described as living on a volcano. Los Angeles lives on an aqueduct. Without it the beautiful palm-lined avenues in Beverly Hills would be dry and brown, and the film stars would not live in a gracious oasis. In England we should feel that this sort of thing was, somehow, not done. But Los Angeles would be even more proud of its water if it came a thousand miles. In fact, with the coming of the grandiose Boulder Dam scheme on the Colorado River something of the kind will happen.

As for the famous studios themselves—well, what did one come out to see? They are precisely what reason would

THE CITY OF ROMANCE

expect them to be, though probably not at all what romance or imagination have painted them. Large in extent, but with nothing imposing about them externally. Why should there be? In a land of skyscrapers these do not need to scrape, and from outside they might be any kind of commercial concern. If you were taken to the entrance of one of them and told, "This is the greatest hat factory in America," you would believe it, and register the appropriate emotions. But, of course, when you know that it is the headquarters of the Famous-Universal-Metro-Allied-Lasky syndicate—why, then you feel rather differently.

The studios lie scattered all over the place, at immense distances from each other. An entrance gate, a door-keeper, offices, clerks—once through these and you are on magic ground, or should be. You may find a street of Georgian houses, a French quayside, half an Atlantic liner, anything. "Lots" of all descriptions. And yet nothing truly romantic, but an air of business everywhere. Nothing really romantic even though, by kind permission, you may at any moment suddenly discover great celebrities at work—a prince of the films smiling down at a young lady who lies swooning in his arms, or a famous siren of the screen drawing a young man, inch by inch, nearer to the doom he so desires. . . . And behind them and around them the directors, the cameramen, the carpenters, the various experts, the varied litter, waiting "extras," perhaps even an author.

This is the fountain-head of romance. And yet, so curiously are things constituted, there is no romance at the fountain-head. There it is work, often very hard and even depressing work. Only as the stream flows away from the fountain-head does it take on colour and glitter. It is romantic even by the time it reaches Hollywood Boulevard, where at the Café Montmartre the tourists come to see the stars in their favourite restaurant. So the stream goes on, growing ever more sparkling, until finally it flows through

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

places like London, and Paris, and Sheffield, where multitudes sit spellbound, and dream of Hollywood and love and all sorts of impossible things that don't happen.

In Hollywood a pair of entrancing eyes, worth many thousands of dollars, sweeps slowly towards the camera. There is a pause. "O.K., Marie. That's fine," says the director, and the camera stops turning. . . . From far away comes the sound of carpenters' hammers.

"I'll say that I feel just about all in," says Marie, relaxing after perhaps many hours' strain.

In London a pair of entrancing eyes sweeps slowly towards the audience. . . . The only sound is that of indrawn breath, and possibly the faint rustle of chocolate paper.

"Isn't she just too beautiful!" whispers Mary to her lover, relaxing.

That is probably quite true from whichever end you look at it.

Despite a search which did not lack a certain ardour, I found nothing resembling indecorum in Hollywood. Those days are either past or never were. My own opinion, decided on somewhat reluctantly, is that they never were, or, at any rate, not more than is the case, or would have been the case, anywhere else. Possibly in the early days of the film rush there was a considerable liveliness among these children of a new world, flushed by a success and prosperity never dreamed of, and as yet not quite aware that the eyes of the world were upon them. But that is a long time ago, and if any such revelations are ever made, they will have the far-away charm that attaches to all accounts of turpitude in days that are no more.

In any case, it would be absurd to expect Hollywood to set itself a standard which would not be observed in any similar entertainment organisation in the world, whether in Paris, London, or Berlin. One of the principal raw

THE CITY OF ROMANCE

materials of the film industry consists of young and pretty girls, most of them burningly anxious to "make good." It needs no deep experience of life to know what this inevitably leads to. Girls in real life are, speaking generally, not so scrupulous about their virtue as they are made to be in story-books. A "director" has power, and if he also has a keen appetite for youthful female charm—what the American film industry unvaryingly calls pulchritude—there is little or nothing to prevent the exercise of his plentiful opportunities. It is equally certain that there are men for whom one of the most powerful attractions of the film business is the unrivalled field it affords them for quick and easy feminine conquests. There have always been such men, and no doubt always will be. Thus one hears stories of the "director's couch," the accepted view being that with such men no aspirant to fame can charm the world's film audiences with her beauty unless she has charmed a director first.

But despite this, all that I saw of contemporary Hollywood is as decorous as need be. Indeed, I have been to studio parties in London much more boisterous—and gay—than anything I found there. It may be that over Hollywood now hangs a certain self-consciousness. For one thing, it knows very well by now that the eyes of the world are upon it. And again, when everybody is more or less famous, and famous for the same sort of thing, there is apt to be a levelling of temperaments. A gathering of film stars is, after all, very like a gathering of Royal Academicians. Inevitably the sobering professional element creeps in. Mix a gathering of film stars with a gathering of R.A.'s and then you might have results.

This is only a partial explanation, because at some such gatherings I saw a good deal of real fun: just the sort of fun that would happen at any good party. Girls whose faces and graces are admired everywhere—one whose

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

"fan mail" is now the highest of all, with thirty thousand adoring letters a month, all answered—behaving with just the same becoming naturalness as though business and the typewriter were waiting next morning, and not that long path of glory which they have been so long treading.

That again, no doubt, is largely to be explained by the fact that they were among themselves, almost *en famille*. The fact that I, a mere member of the ordinary public, by some accident of magic happened to be temporarily one of them must not be allowed to warp one's sense of values. Transfer a dozen assorted beauties from a Hollywood party to any assembly of the world—New York, London, or Paris—and no doubt the effect would be tremendous. In the intimate life of royal families the formalities of majesty are largely ignored, or so one understands. So it is with Hollywood *intime*.

The royal comparison perhaps explains it all best. There is a sprinkling of kings and queens in Hollywood—ruling great studios—many princes and princesses, and so on down through all the gradations of royalty. Here and there is a prince or princess from the poorer film royalty of Europe, but welcome all the same as being a royal cousin. On state occasions—in the studios or elsewhere—the kings and queens are invested with all the attributes of majesty, naturally assumed and freely acknowledged. But on all other occasions there is a pleasant all-round informality. . . . And, of course, there is much visiting between one Beverly Hills palace and another.

"The fact is," said one of the European royalties to me, "it's just a damned village here. You're in one set or another, and you meet just the same people over and over again. If you knew how at times I long to get back!" . . . *Rois en exil*, so to speak. But in some ways a pleasant exile. And in such cases usually very profitable.

Which reminds me that sitting in one of the small studio

THE CITY OF ROMANCE

projection theatres I have next to me a "star" from Britain with a military record behind him. He has done three years in Hollywood, with two more to go. On the screen comes a mixture of sound pictures—various London scenes and then, by Heaven, the Trooping of the Colour, with colour and music complete. Even after a few months' absence it is more than thrilling to me thus to see London's supreme pageantry in California. How it pulls one! And my poor neighbour? He is groaning. . . . "Oh, by Jove, by Jove! What I'd give to see it all again."

Those pictures of London did him no good. They made him realise more keenly than ever that he had two years still to go.

As to Hollywood in its lighter moments, perhaps the smaller parties are best. At several of these I met Ernest, as we will call him, whose name and personality are known all over the world—the entire world—wherever the screen has flickered. Small, electric, never still. Not a suggestion of the grave air of the celebrity hangs over him, even though it is as a comedian that the whole world knows him. By all the rules of these things he should be, in his hours of repose, a depressing influence, a solemn person. Instead he radiates good cheer, dances absurdly, burlesques Mr. Al Jolson in "Sonny Boy"—the rage of the moment—doesn't care if his collar or even his hair is crumpled. This is really royal generosity—for a man to give to his friends at any odd moment what millions wait to see at very rare intervals. It is true, all the same, I understand, that he has his serious moods—possibly very serious, and not without reason, life having played its usual tricks with him. But it is heroic to keep them dark.

"Give us the Spanish bullfight, Ernest."

But Ernest is preoccupied with the heart-breaking sentiment of "Sonny Boy," and with exaggerated gestures, one

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

hand on his heart, one arm outstretched, standing high on his toes, with uplifted chin and shut eyes, he sings :

“ You’re sent from heaven, and I know your worth,
You’re just the (something or other) tum-ti-tum on earth.”

All of which is very amusing in a beautiful and hospitable house which has never been tarnished by the slightest breath of Prohibition.

As Ernest sings a film heroine whispers to me : “ Some day some other blue-eyed baby will come along and take his last million ! ”

Poor Ernest !

Out in the Wild East (which will do as a name for Europe) we often hear stories of the failures and tragedies of Hollywood ; of the blighted hopes and gnawing despair of young girls and men who have travelled the long trail, though not in a covered waggon, to the Eldorado of the films.

There must be many such. Indeed, within a week or so I learn the story of two from the newspapers. One a girl, with attractive photograph complete, who, unable to find work at the studios, forged small cheques. She was dealt with leniently.

The other, a talented young actor who had just missed success and settled his troubles with a revolver shot. These sort of things might—and do—happen anywhere.

But though Hollywood may be full of such unhappy failures, one does not see them. There is no Poverty Corner there—nowhere where the failures hang about. Nobody hangs about anywhere, indeed. There is no strolling or loitering place in all the 436 square miles of Los Angeles. So whatever the city contains in this respect one sees nothing of it. And contrary to what one would think, living can be very cheap, even rents. Somewhere in cheap single rooms

THE CITY OF ROMANCE

the failures contrive to exist, somehow, and the weather is so kind that an overcoat is rarely needed.

But by chance I happen on a sort of failure. I am in the office of a famous film director—or, as England calls it, producer. His name, too, has gone round the world. He is a man of very marked character, cynical but kindly. . . . We will call him Williams.

As we talk he excuses himself for a few moments. A girl has arrived in his secretary's office, he explains, who was on a newspaper in a far-away American city. She came to Hollywood, like so many others, to write scenarios. These, he says, are impossible. He must deal with her as gently as he can. Fortunately, he adds, she has managed to secure a job of another kind—"selling advertising" for a Los Angeles firm, which will take her travelling round Southern California. So it might be worse—if she can sell any advertising.

He goes just outside, leaving the door wide open, so that I hear it all. There is a little weeping in it now and then, and all the time a good deal of heart-break. Quite a scenario in its small way.

"My dear," his deep voice rumbles, "I'm sorry I can't do anything with it. It just isn't my kind of story. But I'll send it to some of the others to read it."

There is a sniffle.

"I don't suppose they will."

"Oh yes, they will. I'll make 'em!"

"Make them! There you are, Mr. Williams! You'll *make* them! You mean my stuff's so bad you'll have to *force* them to read it! D—don't you?"

"No, my dear young lady. I mean nothing of the kind. It's very good, only it's just not what I want. That's all."

"But it's so hard, Mr. Williams, when I know I *can* write. I don't pretend to be able to do anything else, and I'm not

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

conceited, but I d—do just know I *can* write. You know that, Mr. Williams."

"Yes, my dear. But we can't all have just what we want. That's the trouble with things in this life. I can't do just what I want. It's the same with everybody. And you've got this job."

"Yes." (A very pronounced sob here.) "Selling advertising, when I w—want to write scenarios. And I don't want to leave Hollywood."

"But that's where you're wrong. What you've got now is much better. I'd be glad to leave Hollywood. You'll go travelling all round Southern California. Think of that!"

"I don't want to go travelling round Southern California. I just want to stay right here w—writing scenarios. . . . And I know I can."

"Well, that's very foolish of you, my dear. I'd get out of Hollywood if I could. Glad to. I was much happier when I was a boy on the farm."

"Oh, you're only s—saying that, Mr. Williams."

There is much more of it and the big director (I wonder how many would be like him) never loses his gentle patience. And finally he closes the interview with what sounds like a benediction, so kindly and paternal is his tone, and I feel sure that as he says it his hand is resting on her shoulder:

"Look here, my dear, you're all wrong about this. Believe me, this job you've found is really a much better thing for you. You just get to hell right out of this place and don't worry about it any more, and come and see me again some day and tell me I was right."

The joke being, of course, that when he told her to get to hell out of it he meant it very nicely, and that she took it in just the same spirit. In other words, as I said before, it was a benediction, and accepted as such. With a broken word of thanks she went her way to sell advertising in

THE CITY OF ROMANCE

Southern California, leaving her dreams of Hollywood behind her.

Outside the big hotel where I first stay, "down town," in Los Angeles, there is a cripple who sells next morning's newspapers at night. He is a very well-built young man, and hangs heavily on his two crutches, his legs being almost useless. We occasionally talk as I buy newspapers, and he explains that his lameness comes from infantile paralysis. But he is always cheerful and always very well dressed and groomed.

He tells me one day to my surprise that his father was English, a Londoner, born in Westminster. His mother was a Russian emigrant. He, selling newspapers here in Los Angeles, is the result of this fortuitous union.

He has learned my name and always addresses me by it. And one day he says :

"If you only knew what a kick it gives me, Mr. Owen, to hear the way you speak English."

"But you speak very good English yourself." Which was quite true.

"Yes, but it's not the same. We can't speak it out here the same as you do. Gee ! I'd love to see England. You're free there. None of this Prohibition stuff."

And I explain to him that all the same England has her own idiotic laws ; that after a certain hour at night you can't buy matches and things, which is the sort of childish restriction unknown in America.

He can't understand this. It makes him stare. And anyhow, he doesn't want to hear it. He wants to talk about how good it must be to be in England—with a man who talks the sort of English that gives him a kick, which is his way of saying that he feels very sentimental about it. And upon my soul he almost makes me feel sentimental too.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Up at the other big hotel where I stay later, which is much nearer the centre of filmland, the waitress who looks after me in the hotel café becomes very friendly as the days pass. She is about the only waitress I have met in America who hasn't divorced her husband. This one is a widow. But she has been left quite comfortably off, and with her work is doing well. The house her husband left behind has appreciated very much in value since his death. She has a woman in to look after her two children and see them to school, while mother is out working.

She mentions the quarter she lives in.

"That's a long way off," I say. "How do you get here every day?"

"I come in my machine."

This is interesting—a waitress with her own ten-thousand-dollar house, a sort of nursemaid, and her own motor-car.

"What sort of a machine is it?"

"Oh, it's a coop."

"A coop?" I hesitate. "You mean—a sort of thing for two. A coupé?"

"Oh no, not a coupé. I know what that is. This is a coop."

I let this go.

"I'd ask you to come a ride in it," she says, "but I've got a date to-night." She reflects a moment. "I've got a date to-morrow night, too. Let me see, Friday . . ."

"I'd like to see the machine, anyhow," I say.

She mentions at what time she will be driving past the main entrance of the hotel, on the way to her date. Later I take up my station there. It is dusk, and the wide Wilshire Boulevard is alive with traffic. I look out only for coupés, or coops. But the only coupé that passes is a long, low, rakish, smart-looking thing, with just a momentary glimpse of a smart woman's hat above the wheel. It suggests Lady Diana Manners out for a ride. That certainly can't be my waitress.

THE CITY OF ROMANCE

The next day we meet.

"You wasn't there," she says.

"I was, but I didn't see you. . . . Is yours a long, low black car?"

"That's right. A long, black coop."

I had seen her all right.

In the hall of the hotel I run into Williams, the great film director—he who had told the poor little advertising girl so kindly to get to hell out of it.

"What, you still here?" His deep voice booms out, for anybody who is round about to hear. "Why don't you go home?"

"I am going, soon."

"Go home!" he booms. "Go home to that old land of yours, where you don't talk about liberty, but have it. Go home to where you can live a man's life, where there's justice, where a man can do what he pleases, where he can drink what he likes. Go back to dear old London. Go to that place in the Strand where you get such wonderful food—what is it?"

"Simpsons?"

"Go back to Simpsons, where you can get real food. Go home to that dear old London that I want to see again so much."

I am terrified. If any of the good Americans passing us hear all this we may get lynched, and rightly.

"Have you got anything in your bedroom?" he goes on.

"Not a drop."

"I'll send you a bottle up."

It is there within ten minutes, and it lasts me all the way from California to New Orleans.

AN ADVENTURE IN REAL ESTATE

SOMEWHERE ROUND WHAT should be my breakfast hour, the telephone at the bedside rings and a pleasant voice announcing itself as belonging to Mrs. Brown inquires if I will be good enough to visit Somebody's film studios.

Being still not awake, and not having quite caught all she has said, I reply that I have a very busy week before me, but that if Mrs. Brown will be good enough to let me have details by mail I shall be happy to go as soon as I am free.

"Very well. I'll write you," the pleasant voice says.

A printed card of invitation arrives next day. The studios are very well known, even if not perhaps in the first flight. They are famous principally for their bathing beauties. I feel that it is very amiable of them to find me out in this manner and press me to come.

Several mornings later I hear Mrs. Brown's voice again, repeating the invitation. This time, of course, there can be no dallying. She will have a motor-car waiting for me at the hotel at eleven next morning. And on that following morning she rings up at ten to say that the car is starting.

Such attentions are very pleasant. I go downstairs and find an amiable young giant of 6ft. 2 ins. and about 250 pounds (after a time one begins to think in American terms) waiting for me. Thorwaldsen (we will say) is his name. Anyhow, I learn that he is of Scandinavian stock. We start off in his well-worn coupé.

"How is it," I ask, "that they were good enough to invite me like this—to find me out at my hotel and press me to come?"

"Oh, well," he replies, rather slowly, "they get to know

AN ADVENTURE IN REAL ESTATE

who's in town. And then, there's really a certain amount of advertising back of it."

That is in no sense surprising. Even the film industry needs advertising. In its time, indeed, it has had quite a lot.

As we tick off the leagues of Los Angeles behind us, Mr. Thorwaldsen explains that before we go to the studio he will take me to the top of a high building in Hollywood and show me the general layout of the city. There is a fine view from there. He wants to show me how Hollywood has grown and is ever growing. There is nothing surprising in this either. Americans always like to impress such facts on the visitor.

The car is parked, and we ascend to the roof of one of the several score of twelve-story skyscrapers (the local limit of height) that are in Hollywood. We have a splendid view of the mountains and the widespread city. There Mr. Thorwaldsen delivers me what is virtually a lecture on progress. How Hollywood has grown, and incidentally the great fortunes many people have made from real estate. From this high place we are surveying the world and the riches thereof. I would not say that my cicerone is tempting me. He is too nice to do that. . . . Yet one cannot help thinking how easily men have made fortunes.

This done, we proceed another seven or eight miles to the studio, on the northern outskirts of Hollywood. It is a newly built studio which is following the general movement to spread the film industry farther and farther out of Hollywood to where land is cheaper, and sell the old studio lots at enormously enhanced prices.

As we reach the entrance to the studio I see that a crowd of about a hundred people is waiting, men and women, mostly elderly, a mixed and as one might say a very tourist-looking crowd.

This, as we say in America, is not so good. Going over a studio is one thing. But going over it with a hundred others

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

is another. I ask Mr. Thorwaldsen how it is. He explains that these people are all visitors to Los Angeles, and that the proprietors of the studio very kindly throw it open to as many people as possible. . . . Advertising ! I think of the charming voice of Mrs. Brown.

We proceed, led by a man with a megaphone. . . . It is as though we are visiting any other tourist resort—say, the Tower of London. We hear first about the many stars which this studio has turned out. Then we visit a “lot” on which work was proceeding yesterday and on which work will proceed to-morrow, but which at present is empty. We are shown a swimming pool, used both for bathing beauties and naval battles, and this also is empty, either of beauties or battles (or even water). We crowd into a tiny theatre and hear a young lady on the screen sing two or three jazz songs. And it is all over. We have been twenty-five minutes going through the studios, and in the process have seen no sign of human existence except the lady on the screen, if that can be called human. The crowd is shepherded outside the gates again.

“Now,” says Mr. Thorwaldsen, “we go over there for lunch.”

“Over there” is a wooden building, painted in blue and yellow stripes, about as large as the average barn.

I am beginning to feel puzzled.

“After that,” continues my guide, “Colonel Pearson will deliver a lecture.”

“A lecture ? On what ? ”

“Oh—on California.”

More and more puzzled I follow the crowd. Outside the large booth is a small wooden platform on which a man sits in a chair. The platform bears the sign, “Check in here for lunch.” We shuffle in. The wooden room is set with chairs and tables, clean enough, but not luxurious. I have been invited to many lunches in America, but never one like

AN ADVENTURE IN REAL ESTATE

this. We settle down anywhere. To each of us is brought on the bare table a cardboard box. It is marked "Box Lunch de Luxe."

Mr. Thorwaldsen leaves me to see about his car, which on the way out boiled badly. I dive into the cardboard box. It is all right, no doubt, but I don't feel like a box lunch de luxe. I select, gingerly, a small cheese sandwich. There is a small bar where it says bottles of milk may be obtained for ten cents. The milk in Los Angeles is very good. I lunch on the small sandwich and a bottle of milk. A good lunch, really.

I wander out to find Mr. Thorwaldsen, feeling a great desire to get back to the hotel. I feel lonely among all these strangers, everyone provided with a cardboard lunch. Mr. Thorwaldsen not only returns, but introduces me to Colonel Pearson. The Colonel, bluff and hearty, is a very attractive personality. He was in the World War, and apparently all his forbears were in wars right back through American history. His English ancestry is evidently quite notable. He mentions various names—shows me a ring with a stone which he says went all through the English Wars of the Roses.

"What kind of stone is it?"

"It's a black opal."

I am vague about the history of precious stones, but cannot help wondering whether there were any black opals in England at the time of the Wars of the Roses. Perhaps there were. Anyhow, there is no denying the Colonel's bluff attractiveness, and I am told that he began in the war as an infantry private and worked up. And once having met the Colonel there is no escaping his lecture on California.

We re-enter the booth. The tables have disappeared and the chairs are arranged for the lecture. My seat is in the back row, with my guide firmly in attendance. And the Colonel begins his lecture.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Reader, you may have already guessed what it was all about. After a time I do. It is all about real estate. We are gathered there, by siren voices on the telephone, for the purpose of being persuaded to buy lots. We are a crowd almost entirely from the Middle West, where the winters are long and bitter, and where storekeepers and farmers dream of the day when they will be able to go and live on their savings in the perpetual sunshine of Southern California.

Of such is the population of Los Angeles very largely made up—elderly people with sufficient dollars put by to go in search of everlasting sun. And we have been deftly gathered up from the various hotels, not to see film stars in their native surroundings, but to hear the Colonel talk about fortunes in corner lots. And thinking again of the sweet voice of Mrs. Brown on my bedside telephone, I realise how beautifully it has all been done.

But what a discourse the Colonel gave us. Never have I heard such a perfect piece of spellbinding, never seen more perfect acting. The Colonel, no doubt, was a good soldier. But at selling real estate he is a genius. Time and again he draws applause from the audience. They are his. If all he said could have been taken down in shorthand, it would have stood for all time as a perfect essay on temptation to people who may, or may not, want to invest. That, unfortunately, was impossible. But stray gems from the Colonel's lavish and glittering display find their way to the back of an old envelope.

He tells us stories of men who have become fabulously rich from buying corner lots,—“right here, almost where we are now sitting.” He tells us stories of men who have not seen Fortune beckoning until too late, and have remained forever embittered.

He gives us figures. In ten years land values in Chicago

AN ADVENTURE IN REAL ESTATE

have increased 76 per cent. ; in Detroit, 350 ; in Los Angeles, 906 ; and in Hollywood, 1,666 ! (Cheers.)

He pays special compliments to women—their courage and enterprise. They will do things men won't. He stresses the necessity for a wife to have a separate estate. If the husband won't part with the money, then let her take it. Let her invest it in just one of the lots on the map behind him. Some day the husband may prefer a blonde. "In that case you can tell him to take his blonde and go to it. You'll be all right." (Cheers and laughter.)

"Real estate is the best possible investment. Why ? Because nobody can invent any more earth.

"Go and ask Gilbert E. Beesemeyer where he made his money. Where was it ? Why, right here in Lemon Grove.

"Now, folks, stop and think. . . . If you tell a Frenchman, a German, an Italian, that you live in Pasadena, he won't know what you mean. But tell him you live in Hollywood and watch his eyes light up ! All the world knows Hollywood. All the world wants to come to it. You can go to the naked savage living in darkest Africa, to the untutored aborigine, who bites raw meat with his sharpened teeth so that the blood runs down his chin, and you can say to him, 'I live in Hollywood,' and what will he reply ? He will reply, 'Yes, Boss, I'se thinkin' of movin' there myself.' " (Much laughter.)

And so on for an hour, embellished with humour, statistics, and figures of speech. A wonderful entertainment, so that though I begin to wonder whether I am in a tight corner, and whether my young giant of a guide is serious in his business designs on me, I enjoy every minute of it.

The lecture over, I congratulate the Colonel, and try to escape. But my young Scandinavian protests. Now that I am on the estate I must have a look at it. The car is his and

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

I am more or less at his mercy. We make a long tour. Roads made and in the making, palms planted, here and there a house erected and occupied. We inspect several pleasant little bungalows of Spanish architecture. He advises me to take one of their small \$2,750 plots. I can buy it, half down, go back to London and leave its value to grow and grow. Or I can erect a bungalow court on it—six small bungalows—and rent them out. . . . For a moment I am almost persuaded.

The tour over, he explains that he must call at the office before leaving. I must be "checked out." It appears—or so he says—that all the time the company has been running me round, box lunch included, I have been insured for \$10,000. They must see my body before I am taken away again.

We arrive at the barn once more. As we draw up, the Colonel, writing with chalk on a blackboard, roars out, "Lot 2798 is sold." One chance less for me. My guide ushers me into a tiny cubicle. I am formally introduced to Mr. Warburton, an official of the company, who welcomes me. The door closes. The three of us fill the room. I am trapped.

They discuss what I have seen. Mr. Warburton then takes charge.

"Now look here, Mr. Thorwaldsen. You're a bigger man than I am, and no doubt you'll have something to say to me about this when Mr. Owen's gone, but I want to tell you what I think about your showing him only small plots. You ought to have shown him those wonderful \$9,000 corner lots. (Turning to me.) Now, sir, let me explain to you how the Jews buy real estate. They know how to make money in this game. When they buy, they buy big. And, mind you, when they're buying real estate they're not tight. They'll pay the price all right. Why? Because they know

AN ADVENTURE IN REAL ESTATE

the bigger the buy the more they make. Well, now, you see this corner lot here . . .”

So the net tightens. Earnestly, sincerely, with all question of the film studios long ago ignored, Mr. Warburton tries to sell me a \$9,000 lot. But at last my manhood asserts itself. I explain gently that I came out to see films, and haven't seen any; that I have spent five hours on the process; that I really must get back to town where an appointment awaits me; that in any case I should want to think the matter over somewhat; but that if they will be good enough to send me on some of their literature to the hotel. . . . In short, rising, I as gently as possible close the interview.

Mr. Thorwaldsen takes it very well. He explains as we go out that the company has no literature, and we drive back with a radiator that is still boiling. I commiserate with him on his bad fortune in having picked up a client who could be of no possible use. He replies that it has been a pleasure. He is only in the real-estate business in the winter months, he explains. In the summer he runs a restaurant of his own on Catalina Island, where the big fish are, and where Mr. Wrigley, the chewing-gum millionaire, spent many millions on development.

We shake hands cordially as we part at the hotel, and I really feel that, if such a financial detail had not mattered, it would have been pleasant for his sake to buy a \$9,000 lot. . . . But once safely inside the hotel I find that all such generous sentiments have entirely evaporated. It must have been just the relief of final escape.

Next day a friend explained more precisely what had happened to me. When Mrs. Brown succeeded in picking me up on the telephone I was then technically known as a “prospect.” For her initial services in beguiling me she would receive \$5, whether I proved to be finally profitable or not.

The next stage was with Mr. Thorwaldsen, who was to

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

lead me gently along until I should feel that in common decency's sake I must buy something, having taken up so much of his and the company's time. And the final conquest was to be made by the "high-pressure salesman" in the cubicle, bludgeoning all semblance of common sense out of me with his talk about the quick money to be made on a \$9,000 lot.

Two days later another very pleasant female voice came to me on the telephone, called me by name, gave me her name, mentioned somebody I knew, and went on :

"That certainly was a nice article you had in the paper. We enjoyed it very much. . . . What we want to do is to show you the *real* California. . . . You'll see the most marvelous real-estate developments down there you've ever seen. It's *positively* beautiful. . . . Of course, you won't be asked to buy anything, but . . ."

"Madam, I regret to say that there's no prospect of your making me a prospect. I've already been one."

With a polite murmur she faded away.

THE ENCHANTED HILL

WHEN, AFTER TRAVELLING round the United States, I was back in New York, an American in a club said to me :

“What has been your most interesting experience in our country ?”

I thought rapidly and intensely. This is the sort of question that is not too easy to answer. I thought of the Grand Canyon ; of that night of orgy in a Los Angeles hotel between college boys and girls following a “football game,” of the wonderful bar at the Bohemian Club of San Francisco, and of all sorts of other things, some pleasing, some less so. I thought of a certain dinner at which I had sat between two very eminent and high-minded citizens, only to be assured afterwards that both had been financial filibusters of no mean order, though now very respectable and distinguished men. . . . And I still searched my mind for an answer.

And then, mercifully, the truth came into my mind, and I replied :

“I think it was a hot game of ping-pong that I played with William Randolph Hearst.”

I could not have said anything more impressive. Especially when I added that this historic contest had taken place at Mr. Hearst's Californian ranch. Everybody in America seems to be interested in Mr. Hearst's great domain in California. In a country that is accustomed to all sorts of things from millionaires, this seems to impress them all as something really romantic and out of the ordinary.

It is gratifying in no small degree to look back and remember that in a house party—or a ranch party—consisting principally of film stars from Hollywood I proved to

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

be something of a champion at table tennis. One never knows, when abroad, in what unexpected ways one may be able to uphold the prestige of England. It may not be too gallant to say so, but truth compels me to record that, as far as ping-pong is concerned, I conquered Miss Bébé Daniels. This is no ordinary boast, because Miss Daniels is one of those film personalities who has shown that all is not illusion on the screen. Once while performing outside a skyscraper the rope slipped a hitch, or something, so that she slipped a story. I have a profound respect for skyscrapers, and a still profounder respect for anybody who dares dangle outside one. On another occasion, being in a hurry to get from Los Angeles to New York, she insisted, against the pleadings of her friends, in going as a passenger among the mail bags on the U.S. Air Mail, which, by night and day, does the trip in about thirty-six hours. It is something to beat such an opponent at anything, even at ping-pong.

This same passion for truth also compels me to record that I played a set with Mr. Vincent Richards, the famous lawn-tennis player. This was quite a different story. Fortunately Mr. Richards only stayed at the ranch one night, and this ripple on the smooth surface of my championship passed almost unnoticed. It was indeed almost immediately smoothed out by the tact of Miss Marion Davies, who insisted on my playing with her, cheerfully sacrificing her own reputation at the game in order to make more pleasant a visitor's holiday.

Then came the game with Mr. Hearst. This sort of thing should be described with what may be called a meticulous accuracy. The ping-pong table was situated at one end of a very large and very imposing room which contained an ancient roof imported from Italy, an immense Italian open fire-place, big enough to roast an ox, two grand pianos (only you hardly noticed them), many large and comfortable

THE ENCHANTED HILL

chairs and settees, a profusion of bridge tables, and a famous collection of historic and costly tapestries. A lounge room much bigger than the average public assembly room, and much more comfortable.

In the corner near the ping-pong table was a telephone. In his thin, quiet voice Mr. Hearst had been speaking on this to New York, with the same air of casualness with which in London one would ring up the grocer. Then, having finished, he turned to me and said :

“ How about a game of ping-pong ? ”

So we began. It developed into a furious game in which, as the sporting writers say, we were both fully extended. Mr. Hearst may have been putting through the usual deal involving millions on the telephone. But he had forgotten that now. All he wanted to do was to beat me. He is some years over sixty, and a very big man, but that game showed that he was in the hardest possible physical condition.

So this international contest proceeded—England v. America. At first I had no fear of the result. But as the game proceeded I realised that Mr. William Randolph Hearst, proprietor of scores of newspapers, owner of a ranch of three hundred thousand acres in California, and of another one of a million acres in Mexico, did not end there. He was also very hot at ping-pong.

We chased elusive balls and dived under the furniture, in the usual way. We both became very excited, and some of the rallies were tremendous. And in the end he just managed to win the set. As a matter of fact, I think I miscounted a point in his favour. And for another I had something on my mind. The whole party was leaving the ranch in half an hour, and as we played I realised that I had not begun to pack. This sort of thing is apt to put a man off his game.

But the fact remains that Mr. Hearst won, and seemed very delighted with the result. And I really believe that to this extraordinary man, who for many years has played such

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

a prominent and sensational part in the ceaseless melodrama of American life, the winning of this set from one who was no mean antagonist—at ping-pong—meant just as much to him as success in those more public activities by which the people of his country best know him. He is like that.

"You know," said one of his guests to me, "Mr. Hearst isn't just a man. He's a sort of emperor—and a big boy with it."

There is a great deal of truth in that description. I saw many evidences of the emperor. And many peeps of the big boy. For instance, I have seen Mr. Hearst, on a number of occasions, dancing a solo Charleston before his guests, with an engaging grin on his massive face that invaded even those cold blue eyes, the famous cold blue eyes that are known to all America, and have paralysed—on occasions—American newspaper men for the past forty years. He is very clever with his feet, and can dance all sorts of steps.

And he owns scores of newspapers; made (so they say) a very considerable war all on his own; has quite often puzzled and even worried the Chancelleries of Europe; buys art treasures by the shipload; deals in millions daily; has given England hell in his time; has a dry wit; keeps the very best dry champagne; and has made one of the best of modern epigrams.

Somebody said to him:

"There's a lot of money in films, Mr. Hearst."

"Well, they've got most of mine," was the reply.

This referred to a great film enterprise that was not a success, and one must know Mr. Hearst's high-pitched, slow drawl to appreciate it as it deserves to be.

And, as I have described, among other claims to fame he managed to beat me at ping-pong.

I had not tried to collect "big men" in America. Mr. Hearst came to me as a gift from Heaven—over the tele-

THE ENCHANTED HILL

phone. And I suppose that of all America's big men, even including Mr. Henry Ford, there could not be one more interesting.

The call came to me from his chief editor in Los Angeles. Mr. Hearst had suggested I should join a party going to his ranch. Would I go?

A ranch! Imagine it! This to a man who was in his hotel bedroom, trying to decide between sitting down to his typewriter or ringing up to arrange to visit a film studio!

It was not an ordinary ranch, the magic voice went on. It was—oh, well, a sort of palace. But one need not worry about evening clothes. That was definite. But all the sports clothes I had. . . . Very well, then. He was sure I should never regret the visit. The train went at seven o'clock and there would be special cars for dining and sleeping. Don't bother about tickets or reservations or anything.

I had seen Mr. Hearst twenty years before at the *Maison des Ventes* in Paris, looking on at a picture sale. I had seen him a few days before at a Hollywood banquet. Apart from that I only knew of him what anybody who has ever been interested in newspapers must know.

And an hour later I found myself sitting opposite him in the dining-car reserved for the party on the train, giving him my views on the future of talking pictures.

"Not that I know anything about it," I hastened to add.

"On the contrary, you seem to know a great deal," said Mr. Hearst, which was pleasant of him. He is very interested in the film industry, from many points of view.

This extraordinary "ranch" of Mr. Hearst's lies two hundred and fifty miles from Los Angeles, exactly midway between there and San Francisco. It is in the heart of the Californian wilderness, which can be very attractive, and is called *La Cuesta Encantada*, which I believe means the Enchanted Hill. The special sleeping coaches for his guests on

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

the night train to San Francisco are shunted on to a siding at San Luis Obispo, where they remain until a comfortable hour in the morning. Then motor-cars complete the journey, some sixty miles of it, largely along the sea coast, to Mr. Hearst's domain.

It should be explained, perhaps, that Mr. Hearst was born a Californian, which is something that is rated very high in that State, the great majority of its inhabitants being those who have drifted to it across the continent. In this same place Mr. Hearst's father had a ranch, the pleasant frame house of which is still occupied. On the crest of a hill some two miles from it, and about two thousand feet high, Mr. Hearst used to camp as a boy. And it is on this spot that he has built his palace in the wilderness, so that for him this place has all the sentimental associations that memories of youth can give a man.

There are thirty miles of his own sea coast, and the domain stretches far inland, over a succession of mountain ranges in which the mountain lion and the coyote still run wild. There is a tiny private port on the coast, which is being developed into a sort of model village, of Spanish architecture. Its chief imports are art treasures from Europe. A little way back from the tiny jetty lies an English manor house—all in packing cases !

A well-made mountain road winds up to the palace on the hill. A traffic "cop" on a motor-cycle patrols it, to enforce the rigid rule that nobody's automobile must exceed fifteen miles an hour, up or down. This is because of the animals that run about, and they consist of emus, ostriches, kangaroos, elk, bison, and deer of all descriptions. From out a shelter of their own three giraffes poke their inquiring heads. . . . The giraffes do not run about.

And so the visitor arrives at the top of the Enchanted Hill and finds himself, as he walks up one terrace after another, facing a large white and very effective building with

THE ENCHANTED HILL

two tall towers, which has a good deal of the look of a Spanish cathedral, and is an amalgam of old from Europe and new from America. In Sienna, they say, Mr. Hearst saw a wonderful wooden ceiling in an old house which he could not buy. So he bought the house, took out the ceiling, and sold the house.

Below the main building, at the foot of the terraces, are three exquisite separate villas, in Spanish style, each one remarkable for the appointments, and even treasures, within, so that more than one celebrated film star has slept in Cardinal Richelieu's bed. There is a swimming pool, of course. Some two or three hundred yards from the main building—perhaps *château* is the best word—is a real menagerie, containing lions, a tiger, bears, chimpanzees, mountain lions, and various other inhabitants. Why the menagerie one cannot quite tell, but there it is, and it is certainly very popular with the visitors. . . . So amusing to stroll down after lunch to see the lions licking and growling over theirs. Real cowboys ride about, for there are many cattle on these ranges, and one of them usually accompanies any visitors who go out riding up the steep trails, on small pinto horses and big Mexican saddles. There are hundreds of workmen scattered unobtrusively about because, although a great deal has been done on the hilltop, much remains to do. And all round are magnificent views of sea and mountain. This palace indeed stands on the edge of an uninhabited and beautiful wilderness.

Such, very briefly, is Mr. Hearst's "ranch." I was assigned to the Gothic suite, and a few minutes after my arrival found myself in apartments of my own which were in themselves an amalgam of Old Europe and New America, with a painted wooden ceiling, an old-fashioned four-poster bed, electric radiators in the walls, and all that plumbers can do in the adjoining bathroom.

I opened one of the side windows, some eighty feet up

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

in one of the towers, stepped out on to the circular balcony, and found myself, from the top of this hill of two thousand feet, looking towards a tumbled prospect of mountain ranges which reminded me very much of Macedonia in its picturesque parts.

Here was I at last, after many days of residence in hotels, staying in what, for fun, we will call a typical American home.

A very delightful house party, this. Most of the visitors had been there on many occasions before ; frequent week-enders by the usual reserved coaches from Los Angeles. Most of them were young : girls whose names and faces are known round the world, with a sprinkling of husbands in attendance, who, as a rule, were film directors.

Very charming, most of these girls, with the standard of good looks, as it happened, quite notable, which is by no means necessarily true of Hollywood as a whole. But no conscious exhibition of "sex appeal." On the contrary, a complete absence of it, which is rather odd. Girls who had been through a lot of experience in their various ways, and had no nonsense about them. Girls who, for the most part, thought chiefly of their business, which, on the whole, is exacting enough. And no ragging, not even any boisterousness. A good deal of riding, so that in the daytime most of them were in breeches and boots, a good deal of bridge, some music and motoring, a little greyhound racing, and practically no dancing. All the delights and comforts of wealth and civilisation, with a "Western" background of cowboys and wilderness. What could be more delightful ?

We dined in the long baronial hall, with ancient hanging banners—and another mediæval wooden ceiling from Europe. An admirable cuisine, which was a wonderful change after the excellence but the sameness of American hotels. A claret worthy of any connoisseur for lunch.

THE ENCHANTED HILL

Vintage champagne for dinner. The pleasant half-hour of cocktails before dinner. . . . "Highballs" at night for those who wanted them.

I have read of earnest English visitors to the United States announcing that, "as I was in a country where drink was prohibited, I felt it incumbent upon me to obey the laws of the country, and not to partake of alcohol the whole time I was there."

Each to his taste, or his ideas. But not for me, thank you, at *La Cuesta Encantada*. And in any case, the *possession* of liquor in the United States is not unlawful. If it is in your house there is no law to stop your drinking it. The only way in which trouble can possibly arise is in getting it there.

So if one finds that one's kind host has a cellar of which he may well be proud, though himself of very abstemious habits, then there is no reason why any reasonable visitor should not share his pride. And it is possible that on this Enchanted Hill the liquor arrived by enchantment.

Those were very jolly meals where the host, very much the big boy and very little the emperor, presided over his youngish company, always ready to release a chuckle of quiet mirth, just the same in manner to everybody, young or old, important or otherwise. Could this be William Randolph Hearst, the master of sensationalism in politics and news, the old-time Twister of the Lion's Tail, the discoverer of dreadful secret treaties between Britain and France!

And happily for us all we had the Count, whose gleaming and inflexible monocle seemed to symbolise all that Europe stands for in America—whatever that may be. A wonderful character was the Count. He had figured in grand opera for years, but now Hollywood was his home. He was a sartorial dream. He never appeared before lunch, but when he did it was worth the delay. Collar, tie, handkerchief, clothes,

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

socks, and shoes, all blended into one perfect colour scheme. Down at the menagerie the Count and I one day stood talking with a cowboy and an animal keeper. The sartorial contrast was delightful.

A pleasant wit had the Count, and a fund of good stories—principally about himself—expressed in fluent English that yet never would be quite English: “so she say to me, my dear Count, I would haave you know . . .”

At night, in the great lounge room, where immense logs burned in the massive open fire-place, a few of us would sit, “highballs” near to our hands, listening to the Count’s stories of his life. Here “sex appeal” was not absent. They were, in short, the Count’s experiences with the fair sex. And he could tell his stories of real life with a finish that made them works of art.

“And I say to you, thees lady was thee most beautiful woman I had ever seen. And she say to me . . .”

What could be more comically romantic than his story of the wife of an Albanian pasha, travelling in Europe with her eunuch? The Count discovered that the attendant had a passion for *marrons glacés*, and by this means prevailed upon him to betray his trust, the lady being more than willing. Or more pathetically romantic than the story of the Russian lady of high degree whom he pursued up and down Europe for years, despite the dangers of a jealous husband, and who finally gave him a rendezvous in an Italian city, which he hastened to keep, only to find on his arrival there that she had died that very morning, alone in hospital, of a sudden fever, so that he had to arrange the funeral, and accompany to the grave the woman whom he had raced across Europe to clasp in his arms?

There was a little suggestion of Boccaccio about those late gatherings round the great log fire—except that the Count told all the stories.

THE ENCHANTED HILL

One Friday three of the kings of Hollywood flew up in a large Fokker plane, landed in the mid-morning for a call, flew on to San Francisco, where they lunched with the newly elected President Hoover, arrived back for dinner, and stayed the week-end, the great plane waiting their pleasure to take them back to Hollywood on the Monday morning. That is the way to pay calls.

There was a game the visitors were fond of playing called "Averages" or "Conclusions," or some such name, which was said to have been invented there by Charlie Chaplin. One of the company went into another room with a list of questions to answer concerning himself, or herself. There were ten such queries: what you thought of yourself in respect of sincerity, sense of humour, æsthetic appreciation, sex appeal, intelligence, and so on. The maximum number of points for each division was ten. Those who remained behind were armed with a similar list, and as a result of frank discussion concerning the absent member of the company, the company awarded its own scale of marks. The really amusing part of the game was when the absent member was called in to read out his, or her, list, to be compared item for item with the conclusions of the general company.

There was good fun in it, but sometimes the most unlikely subjects of this searching examination were quite brusquely handled.

Some were deliberately over-modest, and were quickly told so. Others, consulting only their own honest belief in themselves, had marked their papers too generously, and were as quickly told so.

Enter, timidly, a beautiful girl whose face is known to the world, and whose monthly "fan mail"—from admirers—is of tremendous dimensions.

"What did you give yourself for good looks?" she is asked.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

She consults her list.

"I gave myself six for that," she says, prettily.

"Oh no, we gave you nine for that." (A very just estimate. There were one or two who had hovered on the verge of ten, which of course would mean that beauty could no further go.)

"And what did you give yourself for sex appeal?"

"I gave myself six for that, too."

"We gave you three." Which perhaps was slightly cruel, but which also shows that an almost perfect beauty by no means necessarily inflames men's hearts. And for further proof of this, another film heroine, who could not by any conventional standard be called beautiful of face, and was not so judged, rocketed up to nine for sex appeal. In a quiet way she appeared to be very satisfied with the result. No doubt she was right.

Enter, list in hand, a really famous film director who has provided the world with many of its greatest screen spectacles; a man whose word is awful law to thousands of human pawns when he is making one of his "supers"; more than that, really a man of parts.

"Intelligence?" he is asked, a trifle more brusquely.

"I gave myself seven for that."

Very quietly comes the reply from the fearless Chief Inquisitor:

"We gave you five!"

The great man took it very well indeed. His smile at these words, indeed, was worthy of the best traditions of that old-world diplomacy which is now so decried in the New World. And I admired him for the way he did it more than I am ever likely to do one of his super spectacles.

As will be seen, it is a game which has its serious side.

Into this ideal existence crept the baleful shadow of international politics.

THE ENCHANTED HILL

Close to the main château is a modest wooden building which is a sort of newspaper office. Here telegraph and telephone communicate instantly with all parts of the United States. From here go out instructions, comments, and "editorials" for any or every big city, and at any moment an editor in New York may find himself speaking to his chief in California. It is rather romantic, in its way.

The morning after Armistice Day I was sitting in this office reading a copy of that day's Los Angeles *Examiner*, which, by some miracle, had already arrived in that out-of-the-way spot. It contained a full report of President Coolidge's Armistice Day Speech. . . . "Coolidge Rebukes Europe for Failure to Disarm."

Silent Cal had become a talkie at last! As I read his carefully prepared discourse I felt more and more unhappy. It was full to the brim of that particular brand of unctuousness which America so often affects when it speaks officially of Europe as a whole. It chided and scolded and was very superior. In it President Coolidge made his famous discovery that the United States had lost money on the war. And it was full of a complacent patriotism which rode over facts as does the *Majestic* over a gentle swell.

"When the great conflict finally broke upon us we were unprepared to meet its military responsibilities."

"Broke" is good after three years in the stalls, watching it as a spectacle.

"What navy we possessed at that time, as is always the case with our navy, was ready. Admiral Sims at once carried new courage and new energy to the contest on the sea."

One can imagine how the gallant Admiral, who knew the sea facts, and was the best friend England found in the war, must have wriggled when he read that sentence.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

"So complete was the defence of our transports that the loss by enemy attack in sending our land forces to Europe was surprisingly small."

Forgetting, as President Wilson did before him, that the British Navy ferried the bulk of the American army across, which, without that help, could never have landed in Europe.

"As we study the record of our army in France, we become more and more impressed by three outstanding features. The unity of the American forces and the integrity of the American command were always preserved. . . . And finally they were undefeated. For these outstanding circumstances, which were the chief sources of the glory of our arms, we are indebted to the genius of General Pershing."

Meaning, presumably, that the British and the French, who between them were killed at the rate of fifty for every one American, were always going about getting defeated.

So reading and mentally commenting, I went through the speech, finding it, as the Americans say, not so good.

Wherever one may be abroad, one's nationalism is inevitably a little more alert than is usually the case at home. And as the only Englishman living on the Enchanted Hill (with the exception of a cowboy who came from Wimbledon), I could have wished that Silent Cal had forever held his peace. How can you really feel and practise the splendid ideal of Anglo-American accord when a President does that sort of thing? And as a Briton whose income tax bore direct relation to American prosperity, war and post-war, I felt that as a chartered accountant and a financier President Coolidge had made somewhere a very grave error in calculation.

Two days later a few terse remarks, in reply to all this, made by Lord Birkenhead at a public dinner, were flashed across the Atlantic. Little did that electric personality

THE ENCHANTED HILL

realise, when he said these things, that his remarks would have a direct repercussion on my affairs in California! While appreciating to the full his telegraphed comments, I felt on the whole that I would rather he had not said them. . . . Still, it was President Coolidge who began it.

Two nights later, Mr. Joe Willicombe, Mr. Hearst's very genial chief secretary, handed me a document which looked like a typewritten petition. It was on a single roll of paper from a telegraph machine, and was two yards or more long.

It was an editorial, he said, written by the Chief, which would be featured in every one of his newspapers on the coming Sunday. The Chief had thought I might like to read it in advance.

And so, later, in bed, amid the silence of the Gothic suite, after the Count had charmed us with some more of his reminiscences, I read Mr. Hearst's editorial.

It was a snorter!

Coolidge and Birkenhead had been mere skirmishers. . . . Hearst opened up with one heavy battery after another:

"Lord Birkenhead's speech certainly contains much new news for the people of the United States and especially for the two million American men who went across the seas, and who know in what desperate plight they found the English and French forces, and who know that if America had not sent aid and sent it rapidly and irresistibly, that the speeches which were made at Lord Birkenhead's banquet Wednesday night would have been made in German."

Wow!

"Lord Birkenhead says: 'My answer to the President of the United States would be that we ask nothing from them except good will.'

"This is really good news, fellow American citizens.

"This means that when the good pals, England and France, get into war again—as they surely will if they

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

follow the course which their naval and military compact marks out for them—the United States shall not be called upon to lend them again nine billion dollars and only get part of it back.”

This from the country which refused to lend any more money to the country of Lafayette, and insisted on Britain being responsible for it instead!

“It means also that we will not have to go into debt ourselves to the extent of twenty-two billion dollars in order to render them immediate aid in response to despairing cries for help.

“And most gratifying of all, it means that we will not again have to sacrifice the best blood of our nation in a squalid squabble of hate and greed among European nations, a quarrel in which we are in no way interested or concerned.”

This from a country that gave 50,000 of its best lives—a proportion of them unhappy negroes—to a much smaller nation that gave 1,070,000 lives for a war that nobody in England ever realised had anything to do with greed, but which all the best minds in America insisted was a war “to save civilisation.”

“England is heading directly for another great war, a war which her secret diplomacy and her compacts and conspiracies with warlike European nations will be certain to create.”

This to the country which, ever since the last war ended, has been working like a devoted uncle to get Europe straightened up, which has abandoned practically all its financial claims to this end, the while America has sent her “observers” to look on—and collect.

“The next great war in which England is engaged, no matter whether she emerges victorious or not, will mean the utter elimination of the class to which Lord Birken-

THE ENCHANTED HILL

head belongs, and the complete socialisation of the British Isles and the British Empire."

If the reference here is to what is known as the British aristocracy, the reply might be that a very large proportion of that class was eliminated in the last war, on the battlefield.

"It may even mean the termination of the British Empire, because the people of the British colonies feel towards war—no matter what their spokesmen may say—exactly as the people of the United States feel towards it."

And so on, much more of it, with the innocent victim of all this feeling more and more depressed, and realising how impossible it is for the United States ever to know the glimmerings of truth regarding England and the war, or England and anything else, when in two days' time many millions of its inhabitants would read this and swallow it, and mightily relish it.

I slept on the matter.

The next day I begged a few words with Mr. Hearst, after lunch, and scroll in hand, further asked his permission to discuss what he had written. He was amiability itself, entirely the big boy, and in no way the emperor, or even the great newspaper magnate. He even agreed, smiling his attractive and candid smile, with many of the comments I made on his own written views. But, as he explained, he had to get his own effects in his own way. . . . I had to be content with saying my little say for England, with a sigh at the impossibility of nations ever understanding each other.

A few days later we played our historic game of ping-pong, which in its own fashion, I am persuaded, did a little to help on the good cause of Anglo-American understanding. In this contest, as the reader may remember, England was beaten, which on the whole, in matters of

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

international sporting contests, is always a good thing, and nearly always happens, anyway.

On that day we all left the Enchanted Hill behind us, everybody bound for the home of the films.

There had been a period a week earlier when, for nearly two whole days, a howling storm of wind and rain had ceaselessly swept the high hilltop, so that departing guests, in the evening, stepped out into a tornado, and film stars were buffeted and thrown about, and drenched, before they got to the waiting motor-cars, just as though they were acting the parts of distressed heroines on the screen. But since then the Californian sun had shone almost uninterruptedly, and only during those two days had the hill lost its glamour.

At something before one in the morning we were all of us—our host, a nice peeress from England, the Count, and the rest—delivered at the station of San Luis Obispo, sixty miles from the ranch, to await the night train for Los Angeles. A pleasant wayside station. A big stove glowing red-hot in the waiting-room. A placard on the wall offering \$5,000 reward for the apprehension of the bandit or bandits who, on a recent date, had held up the passengers on the "Lark," one of the crack trains between those two antagonistic capitals of California, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Near the station, I noticed, was a café. And, as may be the case when one has been closely in the company of host and guests for the best part of a fortnight, I felt it would be a nice action on my part if I withdrew from everybody, and spent the time of waiting for the train in the café.

On closer acquaintance it proved to be the Depot Coffee Shoppe—Open all Night, which is something that would be impossible to find in a very much out-of-the-way spot in England, or even anywhere outside London. And "Coffee Shoppes," by the way, are to be found all over the

THE ENCHANTED HILL

United States. Often, indeed, it is Ye Olde Coffee Shoppe, which somehow one cannot help feeling is some sort of tribute to the English idea. It was amusing, anyhow, to find it in Spanish California.

I entered the Depot Coffee Shoppe, took one of the few vacant stools round the oval counter—and found myself sitting next to William Randolph Hearst. He too had quietly sneaked away from his guests to pass the time of waiting alone. He was enjoying a glass of milk and some crackers. I also ordered milk. If one dare not drink coffee at one in the morning, milk was the best alternative, and anyhow, the milk anywhere in America is first class, and served up in clean bottles.

There were various signs of welcome hung up round the café. The most impressive of them ran :

We treat you right
Both day and night,
No reason for a frown.
Eat your fill,
Pay your bill,
And bring your friends around.

A very pleasant little café, clean and attractive, with the two or three waitresses as brisk and cheerful as though it were high noon instead of past one in the morning.

The usual train hands were sitting round the counter : men with enormous peaked caps, and their big gauntlet gloves in evidence. (It is a pity that the British artisan does not follow this excellent example and so save his hands from the indelible stains of toil.) There were artisans of other types, in blue jeans. And happily the Count wandered in, his sartorial perfection and gleaming monocle bringing a gratefully exotic touch. In a Broadway cafeteria that monocle might have excited derision. Here nobody seemed to notice it, which was something worth noting. . . . Perhaps they realised that we hailed from Hollywood.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

But what pleased me most of all was, that sitting among this mixed company of this tiny wayside café should be one of the biggest millionaires of America, and one of the most notable figures in it, quite unaware of the fact that he was being democratic. That is how, every now and again, American democracy really pleases. There is, of course, no reason why the owner of *La Cuesta Encantada*, and of a million acres in Mexico, and so many other things, should not sit in such a café, drinking a bottle of milk, perched on his high stool, with such a complete lack of self-consciousness. But, on the other hand, one would not find it being done by an English millionaire of the first financial class. . . . Which was why it was so interesting.

Somewhat boldly I tried to pay for Mr. Hearst's bottle of milk and crackers. But, the kind host to the last, he wouldn't allow me, and instead paid for mine.

And so back to Los Angeles, and that Mecca of all modern romanticists, Hollywood. But not until there was quite a lot of fun in the long sleeping-coach before everybody went to bed. Parties, of sorts, in various compartments. Just a touch of that boisterousness, indeed, which had been so completely lacking at *La Cuesta Encantada*. . . . And, leaning against the door of one such compartment, my shoulder picked up a large lump of chewing gum which somebody had "parked" there.

Where it came from was an utter mystery. It needed some force to detach me from the door. It needed even more force to detach the chewing gum from my shoulder. . . . And for some time afterwards the glutinous remains on that suit were a source of despair to successive hotel valets.

NATURE'S BIGGEST AND BEST

"WHICH IS THE TRAIN for the Grand Canyon?" I asked the coloured porter.

"Standing right there, sir."

That is the sort of thrill one couldn't get at Charing Cross—the California Limited to take one on to the Grand Canyon, which everybody agrees is Nature's most astounding piece of work on the grand scale. And a journey which does not end there, but goes on through Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and on to New Orleans. Thrill upon thrill.

There is a large group of Japanese, men and women, gathered at the train to speed three very bespectacled, earnest, and smiling young compatriots on their travels. One of them would do very well for the Harold Lloyd of Nippon. The train rolls out. . . . Good-bye to Los Angeles, its film stars, its amazingly efficient automatic traffic system, its widespread square leagues of city spaces. I am off on the Santa Fé railway to find the wide spaces of Nature.

Not, it is true, in quite the same fashion as travelled the pioneers of the Santa Fé trail. This California Limited is a particularly nice train. There is a charming club car done up in attractive yellow. Inviting stationery marked "En route" calls upon one to write letters. I begin one: "My dear . . ." The train gives a lurch, and I decide to look at the scenery.

Fortunately there is plenty of room outside on the observation platform. That is the advantage of travelling in the off season. We go through miles of golden orange groves, with here and there the vivid yellow of lemons. We climb up steadily through the San Bernardino range: mountain scenery of good ten-thousand foot quality, with

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

clouds on the summits, and the occasional welcome rattle of rain on the train windows.

So over the summit of the line and down into the Mojave desert. But do not pronounce this as it is spelt. Mr. Roosevelt once did that in California, with distressing results to one who had such a sound reputation as an open-air man. It is pronounced (more or less) Moharvey, and sounds much better that way.

Americans are discovering their deserts, and making the most of them with smart hotels and what are called "dude ranches," where the élite do in luxury—and with a bath at the end of it—what the old pioneers had to do because of the cussedness of Nature and their destinies.

All afternoon we rush through a wild world of pleasant desolation and soft colouring. It is not a sandy desert, but it is a very pleasant wilderness, and given that you are travelling through it in a Limited train, and not tramping it with an empty waterbottle, it could not be better. No sign of life and no water, until we come to the Mojave River. The magical change it gives to the landscape teaches once more a dweller in a moist climate just what water means. We come to an oasis sort of township—Victorville, I think it is. The whole region round here is rich in pioneer history, if one only knew it. And the odd thing about American history of this kind is, that though it may be only sixty years old, it is such a thing of the dead past that it seems as good as six centuries.

Evening finds us at Barstow, in the centre of the desert, where there is a very nice station house, restaurant, and bookstall. *Casa del Desierto* it is called. I glance over the most recent pile of best-sellers. They are all there. On into the night to Bagdad, where funny little children come to the train, out of the mysterious darkness, to sell wreaths of white desert holly for Christmas. The Pullman porters and the black cooks buy these, to take home to Chicago. So

NATURE'S BIGGEST AND BEST

late at night to Needles, on the border of Arizona, where a dozen Mojave Indians, squaws and braves, are waiting on the platform to sell basketwork. They push their wares at you with intelligent grunts. Fenimore Cooper was right, after all. They do grunt.

When I lift the blind of the sleeping-berth next morning I look out on deep snow, with a brisk snowfall still proceeding. The train is panting up the grade that leads to the edge of the Grand Canyon. And I wonder whether the worst possible luck is going to be mine, and whether, after years of wanting to see the Grand Canyon, I shall arrive there to find no view. Pondering this question over the day before, I had dismissed the idea of mist as almost impossible. I hadn't thought of snow.

It is still snowing heavily as the few pilgrims on the train go the few yards up a steep hill to the hotel, massively built of logs. But there is breakfast to be thought of first. The snow may stop. It can't be true that one has come thousands of miles to see the Grand Canyon—only to find one can't see it!

Less than an hour later I stand just outside the hotel on the rim of a vast emptiness which I cannot see, but only divine. The snow has stopped, but the most terrific rent to be found anywhere in the earth's surface is just an immensity full of heavy mist. Snow and mist and no view; here where earth's grandest view is covered up. And then the miracle happens. A pale sun struggles through the snow clouds, the vapours in the titanic bowl dissolve, and hang here and there in giant curtains. I see the farther side of the canyon; I see nearly five thousand feet below to what is not yet the bottom, where the Colorado River flows in its deep canal of granite; I see the fantastic chaos of giant cliff and titanic pinnacles of rock, and out comes some of the famous colouring—its vividness chastened by clinging snow and

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

hanging cloud. . . . Just one "effect" out of the canyon's repertory of a million or so.

There are three or four of us standing in the deep snow, on the edge of precipices beyond all imagining, looking down into it all. "If you put New York's biggest skyscraper down there you just wouldn't see it," says somebody. It will do. Anybody who attempts to pat this immensity on the back with any sort of serious description is asking for woeful failure.

For ten minutes or so the magic of that view holds. There are hopes that the mist will finally clear, that we shall see this one small section of the titanic whole in its full glory. But instead the mist closes up again, once more the vast chasm is filled with vapour, so that in place of Nature's ultimate effort to astound there is nothing. For an hour or so I wait, hoping for the best. Then the train calls. . . . What damnable luck! Yet that ten minutes peep into just one fraction of this immensity, which is more than two hundred miles long, was worth the visit. . . . Such is the Grand Canyon, or my bit of it.

Down at Williams, the junction for the Grand Canyon, I sit a few hours later at the railway-station lunch counter. The snow is falling fast. This is Arizona, nearly six thousand feet up, but one can only see snow and a freight yard. An immense yellow freight train, nearly a mile long, rumbles past the windows, and as the snow drives against it the flying flakes impart a suggestion of tremendous speed and volume to the interminable line of cars. . . . Perhaps one impression is as good as another.

On through Arizona, snowbound. We climb up to the divide and halt at Flagstaff, which in summer is a favoured resort of the region. Small frame houses, a two-story hotel, snow. Three young men are seeing a local belle off at the train-side. She has much powder on her nose, and nothing

NATURE'S BIGGEST AND BEST

to protect her legs but silk stockings, but otherwise is not very striking. The young men in their coloured sweaters, heavy boots, and breeches achieve a certain effect of the picturesque. . . . Strange to be assisting at a small social event in Flagstaff, Arizona.

A mile or so farther, over a spider-like steel bridge, the train crosses Devil's Canyon, 225 feet deep, 530 feet wide, and many miles long—a great gash in the red rock of the high tableland. But after what I have seen only a few hours before it looks no more than a trench.

Night falls and—the Grand Canyon apart—Arizona has shown me no more than these arid high plains, whose covering of snow we have now left behind. No feature of interest save an occasional mountain in the background.

I tell myself time after time that I am in romantic Arizona, and that New Mexico comes next, and that I ought to be very thrilled. It is no use. There is nothing to see, except the occasional small towns by the wayside. They are all the same: each one interesting enough in itself as a small American unit, but each one exactly like the last.

We have left the magnificence of the Californian Limited behind. On that I was served a splendid dinner for one dollar seventy-five cents, which only needed something else in place of the iced-water bottle to make it a thing of joy. On this train we have to get out to eat. For half an hour I am a resident in Winslow, Arizona. There are a dozen of us in the dining-room, where the meal is very well and quickly served. Attentive waitresses come and pile all sorts of extraneous bits of things round one's plate—celery, olives, various kinds of sweet rolls, a selection of salads—as is the American way. We ought to have at least an hour for all this. There is too much of it, anyway, and I find myself sighing for an English meal and an English drink. We have to hurry. The train is waiting, and at each door, each by his footstool, stand the negro porters, ready in

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

their offhand way to lock you once more inside the train.

Later that evening we enter New Mexico, and stop at Gallup: a small town of five thousand. One sees Main Street lighted up, with a billiard saloon and a hotel. One of my old dreams of America was to find myself suddenly in one of these small, out-of-the-way towns of frame houses, and abandon myself to a riot of unexpected impressions. But that mood has largely passed. There is no mystery about them—not now, anyhow. One knows exactly what one will find there, exactly what merchandise. The pulse of New York and Chicago beats in all these places, however faintly. . . . And yet it would be interesting to stay a week or two in such a place and get to know everybody. But that is too big an enterprise to think of.

All night we travel through New Mexico, and morning finds us decanted at Clovis, on the farther edge of it, for breakfast. This is all I have seen of New Mexico—nothing. But a few miles farther on is the border of Texas, and we shall travel across that immense State all the day, and all the next night, and a good deal of the next day. . . . I have heard a great deal about Texas, and am looking forward to seeing it. . . . “All aboard!”

IN TEXAS

HERE WE ARE, then, in Texas. This also is a great moment in American travel. Few Englishmen, I think, have not felt at one time or another that they would like to have a look at Texas. There is something about its vast spaces that has always called. And Americans will tell you very proudly that it is "almost as big as Europe." This I think is somewhat of an exaggeration, especially if, for this occasion only, we decide to admit Russia into the European fold. But anyhow it covers some two hundred and sixty-five thousand square miles, which is pretty good for a single state.

Yet my first view of Texas is not thrilling. It is a brown plain, featureless, treeless, monotonous. There is nothing whatever to see except the dry earth and the sparse, coarse vegetation that thinly covers it. Without being savage it is certainly sullen. It suggests to me a very large labouring man, with a three-days' growth on his chin.

These are the plains, the famous Texas plains, where, once upon a time, here as elsewhere, the vast herds of buffalo roamed. The only change, apart from the railway track, is that now there are no buffalo. And no longer the bleached bones of cattle, but—every now and again—the rusty bones of a motor-car.

The train, having proudly begun as a luxurious Limited in California, and dropped to a passable express in Arizona and New Mexico, now descends to a mere local, stopping at every station throughout the long trek over Texas. However, the stations are a very long way apart, and each stop is a pleasant relief from monotony.

Muleshoe is one of the earliest of them, named, as I understand, from (or, as America says, for) a ranch of the same

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

name. It is typical of all the rest, or at any rate the smaller ones. A dusty road comes running down to the station—a small Main Street set down on the plains, with frame buildings on either side. Just the sort of street down which one would expect cowboys to come riding, “shooting-up” the inhabitants—and no doubt not so long ago that sort of thing happened. . . . But of course these Main Streets are now innocent of saloons, and the cowboys probably come into town to drink pink sundaes.

At each stop the train puts down assorted merchandise and takes something aboard in exchange, though I am vague as to what these commercial transactions are. I am more interested in the people. They are mostly husky men in wide felt hats, or quaint peaked caps, extravagantly coloured woollen jerseys, breeches, and heavy boots. They might be cowboys turned farmers, and give a distinct touch of local colour. Many of them no doubt live miles away from these small towns, in a far hinterland to right and left of the railway. Their rusty and dusty Fords stand waiting.

Some of the halting-places are more pretentious—well-built railway stations, with brick buildings showing in the Main Street. One such is Slaton, where we stop for lunch.

The sparse handful of passengers from the Pullman sits round the glazed lunch counter. There are also various members of the train crew, delightfully arrayed in blue jeans, and with those quaint linen caps that have enormous peaks. One of them is the driver, the engineer. He wears large horn-rimmed glasses, and looks like a college professor out on a hunting trip. I would give anything at some of these wayside interludes to be half a Phil May with a pencil.

The waitress, a nice plump girl, hands me the menu :

Yankee Pot Roast, with Noodles
Turkey Croquettes, with Cream Sauce
Chili Con Carne, Mexican style

IN TEXAS

Boston Baked Pork and Beans Individual
Hot Veal Sandwich, Mashed Potatoes.

And so on, lots more of it, with "pies" of apple, peach, blackberry, and mince.

Not feeling very hungry I temporise, and begin by ordering hard rolls, hoping thereby to escape the soft and sweet ones. And the girl, with what I delightedly recognise as the soft Southern drawl of the romance writers, says :

"Hot rolls !"

The manager of the lunch room happens to be standing behind me. He at once translates :

"Hard rolls," he says. She smiles pleasantly at my foreign ways, and produces them.

The next discussion of the menu goes as follows :

Myself : "A bottle of milk."

The Girl : "Buttermilk ?"

The Manager : "Bottlamilk."

Thus we get through, with the girl and me smiling at each other, much as Mademoiselle did to Tommy in the war.

Lunch over, we board the train again, the great bell on the massive engine goes clang-clang-clang-clang, and off we roll further into Texas.

As we proceed, day after day, the small company aboard the Pullman comes to know each other better. There is for instance the New Yorker, a retired physician returning from a trip to California. He says in Texas what he would never dare to say in California—he has no use for it (California). New York for him, cold or not. And I find he knows many countries, India among them.

But he is a good American. He feels that he must say the right thing about Texas, while he is in it. Looking out on the parched landscape he says what a wonderful country it is. The proud Americanism that is in him urges him

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

forward. It will grow anything, he says. He recites an interminable list of the things it will grow. There appears to be almost everything except Alpine moss. But still he goes on, determined to squeeze out the last drop of praise for Texas.

"Turkeys." He brisks up as he thinks of this. "Onions—wonderful onions. . . . Cabbages."

He has finished at last, and relapses into silence. He contemplates for a while the endless miles of featureless Texas rolling past. Then he purses his lips, vigorously shakes his head, and bursts out with :

"But, Gosh, I wouldn't live here, not for a million dollars."

There is also the very, very fat man from New York, youngish, pink, Hebraic, and in the wholesale provision trade. He likes to talk, but has a mannerism which makes it difficult for his partner in such an enterprise. Whenever one says anything, or even seems about to say something, he bursts out with a resounding and questioning "Sir?" at every few seconds interval. He is like Dr. Johnson with the lid off.

"One has to admit they certainly have a fine climate in California," he says.

My lips begin to move in reply. He is waiting :

"Sir?" he bellows.

"I was about to say . . ."

"Sir?"

That's not the way to conduct a *salon*, even in Texas. It is immensely fatiguing.

So ever onwards through Texas. We are less than half a dozen in the Pullman, but we are not allowed to smoke. In Los Angeles I exchanged a few words at a film party with Mr. Jack Dempsey on the subject of England. And shaking his head with what was intended to be gentle reproach, this

IN TEXAS

great he-man said, "It's a very good *man's* country." America, alas! is not a man's country, and on this train, rolling hundreds and hundreds of miles over almost virgin wilderness, the only place to smoke in is the dubious little compartment where we wash.

Night comes at last, and in all that time I have not seen a clump of trees, nor anything more startling than a wayside water-tank. We dine at Sweetwater, and strangers come aboard, which somehow seems very unreasonable of them. It is as though they are invading what has become the privacy of our Pullman.

However, one of them proves to be worth meeting. As we sit uncomfortably crouched over our pipes and cigars in the "wash-room," he tells a wonderful story of the Rio Grande valley, just south, on the Mexican border. Compared with it, my own little adventure with real-estate privateers in Los Angeles was the merest trifle. How special trainloads of farmers from far Missouri and elsewhere were brought down in the greatest luxury, and wined and dined, and kept segregated from everybody who was not strictly in the business, and so dazzled and jollied that they signed for twice as much fruit-farming land as they could pay for, so eager were they to exchange the rigours of the North for the pleasures of farming in the softer South. . . . And how a great many were utterly ruined, but others who managed to hold on did well after all, because the land was good and among other things grew the finest grape fruit.

Just one little fragment of this great serio-tragi-comic epic of American life. Our new friend also told us some very interesting stories about oil, and the "wild-cats" of that strange business, and how a wild-cat would rather ruin himself boring for oil than make money at anything else. . . . In fact, though the way through Texas was very long, I wouldn't have missed a yard of it.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Next morning, at Houston (still in Texas), the incredible intelligence is conveyed to us that we have missed the connection to New Orleans. It is difficult to believe at first, but after our Pullman has been jogged to and fro for twenty minutes, and finally pushed into a station siding, we realise that we are veritably inhabitants of Houston for twelve hours or more.

This at first promises a Boccaccio-like sort of Sunday—stories all day, in a Pullman. But we soon split up. The physician and a lady acquaintance announce that they are going to Galveston and back by street car; but as it is a jaunt of a hundred miles I decide there has been travelling enough. Dr. Johnson takes his wife and starts out to hunt up friends who live in Houston. I am left with a young ensign of the United States Navy, who had joined the train the night before, and is just up from foreign service in Nicaragua. He is all that one expects an admiral in the making to be. Together we go out to explore Houston—which, by the way, is pronounced Hewston. America has her victories in quaint pronunciation no less renowned than England.

Houston is the typical go-getting city. More or less unheard of by the great world a few years ago, its emissaries now far and wide spread the fame of their burg. There was a plot on foot a year or so ago in England to abduct an advertising convention there. More signally victorious than that is the fact that Houston succeeded in having the National Democratic Convention held there, a prelude to the Presidential election. For a week delegates from everywhere sweltered in an unbelievable temperature. It was a bold effort, and it was bad luck for Houston that the Democrats lost the day. Had they won there is no knowing what heights of civic fame it might not suddenly have attained.

As it happens, although this is a winter day, the temperature is very trying. It is clammy and enervating. We stroll for half an hour, my ensign and I, and soon find

IN TEXAS

that we have had enough. Houston has not much to offer to two wayfarers on a Sunday morning. We pass considerable numbers of coloured people in rather depressing side streets. They are interesting enough to me, but mean nothing to my ensign. He inquires eagerly for a certain dock basin, situated on the imposing canal with which Houston has linked itself to the sea. But on hearing that it is eight miles away, we decide to return to the railway-station restaurant which, so to speak, is our base.

So the day passes, very slowly. In the afternoon I settle down alone to write letters in the marooned Pullman. The coloured porter points out that smoking is not allowed. This in my own home—the only place I have to go to ! I address a few brisk words to him worthy of a Southern colonel of the old time, and after that am allowed to smoke in peace, and solitude. What is more, the coon is much more polite afterwards.

At night I decide to explore further for dinner. By chance I discover Houston's Main Street, which before had eluded me. It is full of lights and animation. There are drug-stores, briskly busy, cinemas, and skyscrapers. One of these indeed is an immense pile, thirty-five stories high, and able to look even New York in the face. And I conceive a new respect for this new city of the far South which, according to its lights—and there are very many of them,—is doing all that a city can do.

I discover a restaurant where Houston society dines out. A strange interlude, for me to be part of it for just a brief hour. Then back to the Pullman. The physician has returned from Galveston, very satisfied with his trip. He had a wonderful meal of "sea food"—oysters, crab, and what-not—and admired the great sea wall there. Dr. Johnson arrives, very happy. His friends welcomed him, and took him in. The ensign pops in, with his happy smile. He dined at the station, like a good boy. At nine o'clock prompt the

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Pullman jerks once more into life. . . . And so good-bye to Texas.

Long afterwards I was assured in the most charming manner by an American lady that I had only seen the worst parts of Texas, and that she would have been delighted to show me the best. I could only regret that I had missed such a pleasant opportunity. But what can you do with a State which dares to be rather bigger than Germany? And anyhow, I should have been sorry to miss my Johnsonesque friend with his :

“ Sir ! ”

“ I was saying . . . ”

“ Sir ! ”

A LOUISIANA TRAGEDY

THERE COME MOMENTS in American travel when one's hotel bedroom is a haven of peace and comfort, a very home from home. Then it is that one blesses American plumbing, and that energetic spirit which has wrested from the wilderness a bath to every bedroom. Home's where the bath is. A bell-boy brings up your smaller things, the trunk follows soon after, the door closes, and you are mercifully alone—alone with your fatigue and everything else that belongs to you.

Such a moment as this comes in New Orleans. From California I have spent four successive nights in the train, one of them due to that missed connection at Houston, Texas. They said it had never happened on the Santa Fé before, but this was small consolation for a man who had to spend all Sunday in something very like a freight yard.

Throughout that period from California I had worn—in the daytime—the same shirt. There were two chief reasons for this. One is that, after one day in the train, one's shirt loses its first gleam of purity, and after that apparently would not appreciably alter even if you wore it a week—though it is to be hoped one will never be tempted. The other, and far more important, reason was this: that the morning's ordeal of awakening in a Pullman bunk, acquiring your trousers while in a recumbent position, and generally making a sufficient show of preliminary respectability to be able to walk along to the wash-room and make yourself presentable for the day—all this is such a desperate business that the advantage of having a shirt ready to slip on, without having to rummage into your bag for another, is worth at such a moment at least a thousand dollars.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Oh, those morning ordeals in the wash-room ; especially for a man to whom the awakening for another day is always a difficult process, even in the best of circumstances ! How much more difficult, then, with that *nuit blanche* feeling that follows a night on wheels. The swaying of the train, the collisions with other men who are also washing, the "pardon me's," the shaving soap that won't be found, the puzzling and rather dubious business about the cleansing of teeth and, worst of all, the dreadful discovery that when you think all is going well you find you have left some essential article of attire far away in your bunk. . . . And back in the Pullman car you find women sitting up, prim and tidy, their sleeping-bunks transformed into green-cushioned seats once more, and looking as though they are just about to receive neighbours for afternoon tea. . . . Such a thing is miraculous.

After four nights of this, then, the entry into one's hotel bedroom, at about ten of the morning, even though it is only to be one's home for a day or two, brings all the peace of journey's end. It does not matter that it is New Orleans, and that out of the window one can see, through a haze of smoke and pale silvery sunshine, the shining waters of the Mississippi. All that matters is to be able to stretch and move at ease, to hurl away clothes crumpled by travel and tumble into a bath. Then the formal bedroom seems so comfortable, so home-like, that one wonders whether it is not foolish to leave it, just to explore some new city. . . . Cities are all alike, more or less, and what can be better than lounging about in one's dressing-gown ? Even in New Orleans.

I had sent one letter in advance, and more or less forgotten it, not really expecting it to produce any particular result. But the telephone bell rang, and there followed it an engaging personality, especially told off by his newspaper proprietor to see that things were made pleasant for the

A LOUISIANA TRAGEDY

stranger. Mr. Rayne, as I will call him, was one of those men with whom one finds it possible to glide into an almost immediate intimacy. A newspaper man of wide experience, he had made New Orleans his metropolis for many years past, and liked it and its life. But he liked Mexico better than anywhere else. Most of us are tormented by the idea of being somewhere else. . . .

Our acquaintance was yet very young when he suggested that we should take a stroll with a certain definite object in view.

"New Orleans is wide open, isn't it?" I said.

"Not quite that. But it can be done without too much trouble."

This surprised me faintly, because coming up through Texas I had acquired the impression that New Orleans was so "wide open" that the liquor problem was reduced to the smallest proportions. Who was it had told me that engaging story about a joyous occasion graced by the presence of the local police, including the police band?

We made our way across the wide and busy Canal Street, a thoroughfare which somewhat recalls what was once called Sackville Street, Dublin, where we passed the dusky belles of the South on the pavements. Here, in one flash, one felt a lifetime of storied impressions of the South come to life—cotton-fields, anecdotes about niggers stealing chickens, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and the rest.

Not, of course, that all these dusky young ladies were belles. Beauty is much the same in all races—seen just now and again.

We crossed into the old French quarter, and, forgetting the coloured persons on Canal Street, I tried to kindle the illusion that in one moment I had travelled, quicker than Lindberg, from Louisiana to Paris.

"But despite one's good intentions it could not quite be done. There was the usual clash between previous imagina-

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

tion and the present reality. For many years my idea of New Orleans had been that of an old and gracious city, hallowed by time, with perhaps a suggestion of the quiet stateliness of Bath, and with it all very French, as Bordeaux might be. And here at last I was in "the old French quarter."

To be quite truthful, this old quarter of New Orleans is little more than a depressed Soho. Yet it is this old section of the city which gives New Orleans that comforting historical background which is so rare in American cities. Even if it is a rather depressed Soho, it is very well worth while. On exploration one finds real antique shops there, which look as though old families have been ruined in order to stock them, which must be the case with all real antique shops. Also many shops and houses with two-tiered verandas, which are much pleasanter to look at than exterior fire-escapes. Likewise real French restaurants, which only need a wine list to make them all that they should be, and used to be.

In this Soho also there are fine old houses, still inhabited as such. In one of them one evening I sat before a comforting open coal fire, where the gathering and the talk and the women were just about what you would find in Chelsea, and where, incidentally, it was mentioned to me that the old slave quarters had been turned into a kitchen. One can really feel in New Orleans that it has almost as many yesterdays as to-morrows.

It was at this same gathering, by the way, that a very bright young woman, who among other things had a definite gift of mimicry, particularly in telling negro stories, turned to me and said :

"Of course, in England, doctors are not accounted much, are they?—I mean, they have no real social position."

"Good Heavens ! " I exclaimed, shocked in my best

A LOUISIANA TRAGEDY

feelings, and thinking at once of the dignity of Harley Street. "Wherever did you get such an idea as that?"

"But I thought that was so—surely?"

"On the contrary, our doctors may belong almost to the very best people. Harley Street is a thoroughfare of aristocrats—or nearly. In England a proper consulting-room manner may lead to the Knightage, the Baronetage, or even the Peerage. Why, just look at the list of physicians who have been attending the King!"

"Of course. I hadn't thought of that. Somehow I'd gotten the notion that doctors weren't of much account in England."

This set me brooding very darkly. And later I remembered that, in that astonishing column of his which appears daily—night or morning—in practically every city of the United States, Mr. Arthur Brisbane had recently informed the greatest of all democracies that doctors were of very little social account in England. Not quite "untouchables," of course, but something, apparently, rather less than a shady dentist. It only showed how careful Mr. Brisbane ought to be. Probably that same evening somebody in every city and town in the United States had mentioned, just as an aid to conversation, that English doctors were, on the whole, a very bad lot. And later, when time had done its work, they would say that, curiously enough, most English doctors were ex-convicts. Thus, as civilisation and the means of transport progress, does one nation learn to know another better.

However, to return to my friend Rayne. Having piloted me through Soho he entered a small corner shop, where he was greeted cordially by a man behind a bar set with many bottles. These, presumably, were guiltless of alcohol. They were so very blandly displayed. We passed through into an inner room and sat down at a small table.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

"The usual, please, George," said Rayne to the waiter.

We were served with two glasses of absinthe, and my friend explained that this was the specialty of the house. The room we were in was modest enough, even dingy. But Rayne explained that it was a well-known and even fashionable resort; that men and their wives, on their progress to dinner elsewhere, would pop in here "for one or two" on the way.

Normally I do not drink absinthe in the afternoon. But what else could one do when a man who knew this strange city intimately had, within a few minutes, bestowed on me the privilege of penetrating one of its inner social mysteries? . . . Indeed, George was soon called again.

"Good Heavens, no!" I said. "I don't want another absinthe." But George went about his duty. A local absinthe, of course. Years before, in Paris, I had been moderately familiar with Pernod, and Marie Brizard—names which, one understands, have since disappeared from the cafés of the most "open" of the world's great cities; France's one contribution to the ideal of Prohibition. However, I could not pretend to be a connoisseur of absinthe, and so could not judge of this local distillation too closely. But as alcohol goes—American alcohol—it seemed passable enough.

And it provided another contrast, which is always amusing enough. A day or more before I had been travelling through Texas, where, if the wayfarer in the train produced a pack of cards and began to amuse himself with a game of Patience—or, as America prefers to call it, Solitaire—he would be given the choice of putting up his cards or of being put off at the next station, this being one of the contributions of Texas to the good of mankind. And here in Louisiana I was drinking absinthe. It takes all sorts of things to make up the world of the United States.

A LOUISIANA TRAGEDY

From behind the closed door of another inner room came the sound of loud voices. Not exactly a quarrel or an altercation, but men engaged in a more than brisk conversation, presumably flavoured by absinthe. Rayne made an inquiry of the waiter, and then turned to me.

"Four of the best-known lawyers of our city." He grinned.

The door of this inner room opened, and one of the well-known lawyers came out. He was short and plump, and without being intoxicated was pleasantly "lit up." He returned in a few moments, and once again, behind the closed door, the noisy argument broke out afresh.

Rayne proved to be one of those Americans who sees his own country through spectacles quite untinted with rose. There are quite a number of them about. He uttered a few crisp words about the quality of some of the lawyers who practise at the American Bar, although with no particular reference to those in the other room. From this we drifted to the question of crime, and he began to tell me of a most interesting murder case in which he was now engaged. "Engaged" is quite the correct word, because his functions were for the moment much more those of detective than reporter.

Curiously enough I had already read a good deal about this case, during my dressing-gown stage that morning; a *crime passionnel* of no ordinary kind in which the lover—if he really was the lover—was Dr. Thomas E. Dreher, a country practitioner turned sixty; the husband and victim, Jim Le Bœuf, not much younger; and the wife, Ada Bonner Le Bœuf, apparently somewhere near the fifties.

For the crime of killing Jim Le Bœuf, the doctor and the wife had been sentenced to death eighteen months before. At the same time a man named Beadle, a sort of handyman to Dr. Dreher, had been sentenced to imprisonment for life.

The story was one of jealousy. The dead man had accused

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

the doctor of being the lover of his wife. There had been violent quarrels, and it was said that Le Bœuf had ridden about in his automobile dressed as his wife, hoping thereby to lure the doctor to come and speak to him, so that he could then have an excuse for shooting him. He had also made his wife drive past the doctor's drug-store, himself lying concealed on the floor of the automobile, hoping that the doctor would respond to the wife's signals, and walk up to be shot. But the doctor, previously warned, had ignored these invitations.

Following all this, some sort of reconciliation had been arranged. This meeting took place on a lake at nightfall, a strange proceeding. Mrs. Le Bœuf paddled out on to the water in one skiff, her husband in another. The doctor and his handyman Beadle approached in a third skiff. The story was that Le Bœuf opened proceedings by crying out, "Didn't I tell you never to speak to me, or any member of my family, and that if you did I'd kill you!" He followed this up by a shot from his revolver. According to both Dr. Dreher and Mrs. Le Bœuf, Beadle replied to this by shooting Le Bœuf with the doctor's gun. Later the body was cut open and sunk by means of weights. Both the doctor and the woman maintained that Beadle did all this, and that it was a procedure he was accustomed to when he had shot deer and sunk them, to escape arrest by conservation agents. The body was found six days later.

At the trial which followed swiftly a fortnight later, and lasted a fortnight, Beadle broke away from the other two, and was found "guilty, without capital punishment," which meant a life sentence. The other two were sentenced to death, and were at once surrounded by the dismayed members of their respective families. All this had happened in the St. Mary parish of Morgan County, about a hundred miles from New Orleans, and had caused immense excitement throughout that part of the country.

A LOUISIANA TRAGEDY

Since then, for eighteen months, the lawyers of the condemned pair had waged a ceaseless fight to save them: attempts at a new trial, appeals to the State Pardon Board, the State Supreme Court, and even the Supreme Court of the United States. Many women's organisations had been working frantically either to obtain a new trial or a commutation of the sentence. Louisiana had never hanged a white woman, and did not want to begin.

All these attempts had failed, and everything now rested with the Governor of the State.

In the meantime new evidence had come to light, and my friend Rayne was the one who had found it. He had interviewed the unhappy pair in their tiny cells, and had carefully listened to their stories. Then, even at this long date, he had gone in search of the revolver which the dead man was said to have fired. To his amazement he found that it had been discovered long before by two boys out fishing, and was now in the hands of the Sheriff responsible for both arrests and executions. A son of the dead man identified it as having belonged to his father.

Other hopeful details had come to light. And now, at this very late hour, Rayne, the man now telling me all about it over our absinthe, was hoping to save the unhappy couple from the gallows. If he did not succeed, then they would certainly be hanged.

I found myself very much interested in all this. In England there have been, from time to time, timid and abortive little attempts on the part of newspapers to usurp the functions of justice. In America, as we are all dimly aware, the reporter and the newspaper may at times rival the police and the judiciary. And here I was in the company of one whose own efforts and inquiries had brought about something like a crisis in the politics of Louisiana: activities which were in no way frowned upon by the authorities.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Rayne mentioned that for the purpose of his inquiries he was visiting the two condemned regularly where they lay in their little country prison, a hundred miles from New Orleans. They had been there ever since the trial.

"Eighteen months awaiting execution. Good God!"

"You couldn't have that in England, of course."

"No. That sort of delay is impossible."

I said this without any sense of superiority. It must be horrible in the extreme for a poor wretch to lie in prison for one year after another, with a sentence of death always suspended above him. Yet there is little doubt that at the moment of sentence the average criminal would prefer to be told that he was going to live another eighteen months, or more, instead of a mere six or seven weeks, as in England. If the extremity is dreadful enough, some measure of comfort may be derived from the most unpalatable alternative. . . . And here, in the case of these two, was Rayne still trying to save them. There was still a gleam of hope for them.

"Do you believe in this new evidence that has come up?" I asked him.

"I think there's very likely something in it."

"But the revolver? Might it not have been planted there, since?"

"That's just possible, too. But I prefer to think not."

I gathered that his interest was almost entirely professional—that he was interested first and last in his newspaper; but that, though for that and more humane reasons he would be very glad to see a happy ending to his efforts, he was not allowing the misery of this drama to affect him too deeply. In that, no doubt, he was wise and right.

"But these poor creatures—what are they like when you visit them? What is their attitude after all this long period of suspense and terror?"

He reflected a moment before speaking.

"They're in a state of stupor. Animal-like, almost. . . .

A LOUISIANA TRAGEDY

Then they wake up slowly out of their trance as they begin to talk. . . . It's pretty terrible."

We leave the unhappy subject for the time being, and I tell Rayne that, having heard so much of the old French cuisine of New Orleans, I am anxious to sample it as soon as possible. One may have all sorts of adventures in America, but those of the dinner-table are not easy to find. There is good food in the United States, and a great deal of it, but everywhere there is a certain sameness. East and west, north and south, precisely the same dishes appear. There are no doubt special regional dishes to be had, but the traveller who passes along from hotel to hotel is not likely to find them.

An all-pervading oneness in diet covers the vast country. One may, any day, eat clam-chowder—which is a sort of Scotch broth with very small shell-fish in it, and very good when it is good; one may find clam-chowder any day in Boston, St. Louis, or Los Angeles. And on every table throughout this wide country appear the inevitable celery and black olives. Where all the celery of the United States comes from I neglected to learn, but somewhere no doubt vast areas of irrigated land bear this all-the-year-round crop. But it has not the tang of English celery. America, which is so fond of finding things with a kick in them, is doomed by irrigation to eat many things into which Nature obstinately refuses to put any kick at all. This lack applies even to Californian fruits, though perhaps one ought not to tell it to the world.

The celery and olives apart, there is also an all-pervading sweetness in American diet, no doubt one of the results of Prohibition, although it is possible that America had a sweet tooth even before this social scourge swept down upon it. To the European, dining in America is thus utterly shorn of adventure. . . . One sits down at any hotel or café table.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Like lightning a boy sets down a glass of very cold water, in which floats a small iceberg. The waiter or waitress hands a menu card which is always highly charged with items, and sometimes may contain hundreds of them. The selection is made. And then comes that question which everywhere should sound so gratefully to the ear of the diner :

In England it is : " And what would you like to drink, sir ? "

In France it is : "*Et comme vin, Monsieur ?*"

And so on, with variations, throughout the continent of Europe.

But in America it is so different. There is no kick in it. It goes :

" Would you like your coffee now, sir ? "

Think of it ! Beginning a large meal with a large cup of coffee and cream in a very large cup !

There are millionaires all over America who submit to this daily. In a country of many passions, dinner is passionless. Of course, one may carry a hip flask, but the habit is not so common as is believed ; there are places where it would be difficult to employ it, and anyhow it is a system which is not easy of adoption by the stranger and traveller.

So coffee it is—if you can stand coffee in the evening. Or if not coffee, then milk. And if not milk, then any one of many pallid and strangely named beverages which do not deserve to be served with good food.

Quite soberly—just as soberly as you please—this one detail of life robs existence in America of much of the natural colour which belongs to any other civilised community. There is really very little natural colour in American life to begin with. How can there be when there is no background of history, or very little ; no churches or cathedrals to explore, no ancient places, no famous little streams spanned by lichen bridges, no pleasant wayside inns or charming manor houses, or all the varied interests

A LOUISIANA TRAGEDY

and beauties which the kind centuries have piled up in England and Europe? This is of course in no sense a reproach to America. It is merely a commonplace: all the world knows why it is so, and very many thousands of Americans, familiar with Europe, are equally aware of it. It could only have been otherwise if the activities of Columbus and others had been ante-dated by a thousand years.

America, then, stands guiltless in this affair of having no deep historic background. It is not her fault, but only history's. But she is not guiltless of taking the colour out of eating. That is her own doing. Throughout that tremendous country there is no restaurant into which one may go openly and ask the *maitre d'hôtel* or Jules or Gaston to bring up, with as much pleasure for the provider as the receiver, a dusty bottle of that ripe Chambertin which your heart and palate yearn for—or whatever it is they may be yearning for. Fancy a country being able to show you a Grand Canyon, but not a bottle of Bass in a tankard. . . . A country which contains millions of people whose faces grow wistful at mention of such things.

Many things have been said about Prohibition, but not sufficient attention, I think, has been paid to this wholesale assassination of the charm and pleasure of dining. Throughout that vast country practically every restaurant is a sepulchre, however richly gilded, a fraud, a sham. Of what use all this surging and clamant prosperity of which we hear so much, if one of the simplest, easiest, and profoundest pleasures of civilised existence is ruthlessly suppressed? One may sit in the Ritz-Carltons of New York and see large gatherings of wealthy diners, with women who are all that their own good looks, the fashions of Paris, and the cosmetics of the world can make them—and yet feel that the whole scene is like one of those Californian fruits, brilliant in appearance, but with no essential flavour within. And one wonders how it can come about that politics and

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

prejudice can so enslave a free people, and that though, in an expensive restaurant, a notorious gunman might quite openly be entertaining his sweetie, the appearance of a bottle of champagne would cause consternation among the management.

So that whenever an English audience watches on the film one of those impressive banquet or cabaret scenes which Hollywood so well knows how to stage, let them comfort themselves with the thought that there is not an interesting drink on any table. Indeed, if they will but look closely, they will see those same large coffee cups which follow the celery and the olives. . . . All is not yet lost for Europe.

It can be imagined, following several months of such reflections as these, how interesting it was to be within reach of New Orleans with a cuisine of its own to be explored. My friend Rayne instantly took me round to what, in his opinion, was the best restaurant in New Orleans. There are several good ones, but this was by general consent the best. For the purposes of this story we will call it Gaston's.

I was very ceremoniously presented there and then, with every exhortation that when dinner-time came I should be very well looked after. I dined alone, which was the only drawback to the occasion. Here and there in America I had enjoyed in banquet form some notable repasts, notably a dinner at Sherry's in New York and a luncheon in the charming Californian city suburb of Pasadena. But this meal remains in my memory as the most interesting one I ate in the United States, considered purely as a meal. It had individuality, it was superbly cooked, it was my own. It was served in a restaurant which might easily have been anywhere in Paris, and so confirmed that feeling of something that is not merely progressive and modern and

A LOUISIANA TRAGEDY

successful which pleasantly clings to New Orleans. And this being so, we will honour the menu by setting it out in state :

Oysters Rockefeller.

Langouste Thermidor

Pommes Soufflés.

Perdreau Chasseur.

Salade Bayard.

Small, simple, admirably done, the skill of a first-class chef, trained in the best French traditions over it all. . . . But alas ! no wine. This was in a public room.

However, there was a sequel which was worthy of the dinner, and in its own spirit. By special invitation of the proprietor I was conducted into a private room, where the waiter busied himself over a spirit lamp. There was a conspiratorial air between us. He was brewing, he told me—sh-h-h—a *Café Brûlot Diabolique*, and once his ministrations were completed I sat down to savour it.

There, alone in this small room, except for the waiter who lingered to see me experience a supreme moment, I first sipped *Café Brûlot Diabolique*. . . . The waiter waited. . . . I looked at him. He was almost a real French waiter. There was a short tense silence while we both played our parts to perfection.

“ Ça vous plaît, Monsieur ? ”

“ Magnifique. . . . Incomparable. Quelque chose de nouveau. Ça vaut bien la peine de venir à New Orleans . . . Exquis.”

And so on.

And truly this was not any sort of coffee, but a divine elixir. The waiter told me of what it was composed—spice, cloves, a shred of lemon peel, one lump of sugar, and cognac, their several flavours all most cunningly and

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

graciously blended into that of the coffee ; a species of culinary chemistry more interesting by far than, say, the wonders of Mr. Henry Ford's factory at Detroit. And some day, far away from New Orleans, I shall try to recapture that perfect elixir ; but though I know of what elements it is composed, it is improbable that I shall ever be able so to compound them as to say, " This is Café Brûlot Diabolique—as they make it in dear old New Orleans."

And as later I stole out of that private room, where I had done nothing more guilty than make love to the cognac that was in my Café Brûlot Diabolique, I felt that America had at last given me an adventure—a culinary adventure !

When next day I met Rayne, after reporting to him the complete success of my entertainment *chez Jules*, we talked again about Mrs. Le Bœuf and Dr. Dreher. It had now been decided by the Governor of Louisiana that the execution of these two unfortunates should be postponed until early in the New Year. This was because the Governor did not wish to make the public, already depressed at the idea of hanging a white woman, too miserable at Christmas-time. But it was only a postponement.

In the meantime Rayne was continuing his work and still hoped to save both. He had free access to them at any time in their prison. And he now told me that he proposed to spend Christmas Eve in their company.

" Rather a grim Christmas Eve," I said.

That prospect did not seem to worry him unduly. And in any case, whatever was to be the ultimate fate of these people, one felt that his going there was a kindly action which could do them no harm, even if it kept buoyed up a hope that might finally end in despair.

" What I wanted to suggest," he went on, " was that you should come with me."

This was a shock. But after the first impact of it had

AN LOUISIANA TRAGEDY

passed I considered the matter. There was nothing inviting in the prospect. And yet my rôle at the moment was that of an observer of America, particularly of such aspects as were "different," and here was something as unlike anything we knew of in England as though it were happening on the moon. I could honestly acquit myself of the slightest desire to sup on horrors; to approach, however timidly, the spectacle of a tragedy of which I had only just heard, which meant nothing to me except for that sympathy which we must all feel for anybody in a situation so dire. I should be passing on, and my visit to them could not have the slightest effect, one way or the other, on their fate. It might even be argued that, as a conscientious observer, it was in some degree my duty to do what Rayne was prepared to do. If America did this sort of thing, why should I not witness it? . . . The traveller in China would think it quite legitimately within his scope that he should observe some such example of native customs.

But this was not China, and the two people I should see were not Chinese, but people very much like myself, and speaking my own language. . . . And how should I be introduced. . . . "Mrs. Le Bœuf, this is a friend of mine from England. I've brought him to see you, to . . ."

And what should we talk about? What in God's name should we talk about, except the dreadful story of the tragedy which should by now have long been a thing of the past, and would be but for the operation of strange laws which permitted such happenings to extend their miseries indefinitely! Most worrying of all was the possibility that they might after all be innocent. . . . And anyhow Christmas Eve was still a week away.

"I don't think I shall be able to come with you," I said. "I shall have to be getting on before then."

He did not press me. When Christmas Eve came I was a thousand miles away, but I thought of Rayne keeping his

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

strange tryst with those two partners in a love affair and a tragedy, who for nearly a year and a half now had been living within a few feet of each other, yet separated as utterly by walls of steel as though the ocean, or death itself, divided them.

Rayne had promised to let me know what the results of his efforts would be. But early in January I found in the illustrated section of a New York newspaper a photograph showing Mrs. Le Bœuf, lying on a stretcher, covered with blankets, in the small courthouse, which was part of the building in which she was imprisoned. It was a very clear photograph, and showed a section of some thirty or more people of the crowd in court, sitting in semicircular seats behind the figure on the stretcher. In front were the reporters, behind the public. There were a number of women in the crowd. One, wearing furs, had a nice-looking little boy seated on her knees. . . . And, nearest of all to Ada Le Bœuf, was my friend Rayne, sitting just at the foot of the stretcher—or bier.

The legend beneath the photograph said: "REEL DRAMATICS IN REAL LIFE. Mrs. Ada Le Bœuf, who, with Dr. Thomas E. Dreher, was sentenced to be hanged for the murder of her husband, and was reprieved for one week by Louisiana Governor, pictured on a stretcher during hearing at the Parish Court House in Franklin, La. The pair, unless a court intervenes in the meantime, are to be hanged to-day at noon."

But, as it happened, the long story of horror and suspense was not yet over. The fierce fight to save the two condemned was still proceeding. When the day appointed for the execution arrived, the Governor of Louisiana, by long-distance telephone, twice ordered the sheriff to proceed, and twice countermanded his own final decisions. The drama of Ada Le Bœuf and Dr. Dreher had now become of national

A LOUISIANA TRAGEDY

interest, partly because of the fact that "this will be the first time a white woman has been hanged in Louisiana." But the story had not aroused the whole country as some crimes do, and the New York newspapers only gave a moderate attention to what was so agitating the people in the South.

It was done, after all. The end came some three weeks afterwards—three weeks during which the torture these two had so long endured rose to its climax, if there can be a climax to terror which has endured without cessation for over a year and a half. And one afternoon in a London club I opened a large envelope which contained the complete copy of a newspaper sent by Rayne from New Orleans. The very full accounts of the last hours and the final moments of these two showed that he had kept up his fight for them to the end; showed, indeed, that a few seconds before he left life behind him Dr. Dreher had called out to Rayne, standing in the group waiting to see him die, and thanked him for his efforts!

It was as strange and terrible a scene as has happened in all the history of crime and its expiation. And this happened in the United States on February 1st, 1929.

Indeed, these scenes of the last day and the last hours are so terrible that one feels it difficult to reflect them. But on the other hand, if they can appear in the columns of a very well-conducted American newspaper, why not elsewhere? Why should English eyes be afraid of what may be read in a country which England and Europe has learned to believe is in the van of all progress and all idealism?

If we may read about the Rockefeller Foundation and the high ideals of the White House, why should we not read about what happened to Ada Le Bœuf? Let us at any rate select here and there, avoiding what is most harrowing.

And all to the end of showing what can happen in America to-day. Because, if America is to lead the world, it is right that Europe should know a little more of what America is

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

than can be learned from diplomatic exchanges between Washington, London, and Paris, or what happens at Palm Beach and Hollywood. In any case, it is one detail of the great American scene, and though no man can paint that immense canvas in all its details, even if he gave a lifetime to the effort, there is no good reason why such a contribution as this should not be made, even though it is a story of immense suffering, still more intensified by the law's delays, and has nothing to do with trade prosperity or the Woolworth Building. . . .

On the evening before the day of execution Dr. Dreher received his wife and his two daughters, both of them very nice-looking girls, judging from their published photographs. As these three left "all of the group of reporters through whom they had to pass at the prison door bared their heads silently." For a time Dr. Dreher, following this final meeting, "sat in his cell like one stricken with paralysis. Tears rolled silently down his face." Then he sent for Rayne. "Two fingers of one hand were all Dr. Dreher could thrust through the steel bars in greeting. There was room for no more. Thus we shook hands."

Then Dr. Dreher delivers himself of the last protests of one who has lost hope. All that follows is curiously reminiscent of the last scenes in *An American Tragedy*. But, as usual, fact triumphs over fiction. The last hours of Dr. Dreher and Mrs. Le Bœuf are even more terrible than those described by Theodore Dreiser in his novel.

" 'You and your paper have been fair to us,' said Dr. Dreher. 'I wanted to talk to you while I still had a chance.

" 'I know it's all up with us. Arthur Martel (the jailer) told us early this afternoon that Judge Borah had turned us down in New Orleans. And then Jim Parkerson (a Senator and a lawyer) came to tell me later to-day that

A LOUISIANA TRAGEDY

we'd lost our appeal. He said it was all over in the courts, now. That the only power to save us now rested with Governor Long.

" 'It doesn't look as though Governor Long was going to do anything. I suppose we've got to die.

" 'Well, I'm a doctor. I've seen lots of people die. I know what death is. I've fought death for others. I've held death back for them, too. And if I've got to die myself I hope to walk out and meet it like a man.

" 'I'll tell you, though, it's hard. Death coming naturally is one thing. But when they take you out and strangle you with a rope it's something else again.

" 'It's bad enough for a man to have to die that way. But for a woman——' Dr. Dreher's bulky figure straightened. His massive shoulders squared. He held his head high. He clenched one big fist.

" 'I wish,' he said, 'that Governor Long, who holds the power of life and death over me and Mrs. Le Bœuf from now until the minute they hang us—I wish he could have stood, as I have, beside the bedsides of women for twenty-eight years and seen them go down into the valley of the shadow of death to bring children into this world. He might feel differently, then, about letting a white woman hang in Louisiana when all he needs do is to pick up a pen and sign his name to give her life.

" 'But that is between Governor Long and his conscience and his God. I'll tell you, though. I had rather be hanged and in my grave than have to go down the years like Governor Long with that on my conscience.'

" Dr. Dreher paused for a moment.

" 'I've made my peace with God,' he said. 'I've prayed, and my conscience is clear. I can stand here right now knowing that, as far as anything I can do is concerned, I will be a dead man inside twenty-four hours, and look you square in the eye and tell you Mrs. Le Bœuf and I had no more to do with the killing of Jim Le Bœuf than a babe unborn.'

" He straightened up and looked the reporter in the

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

eyes as he said it. There was the ring of terrific earnestness in his voice.

“ ‘I want the world to know,’ said Dr. Dreher, ‘that I am going to my death, if they hang me, still telling the truth. And the truth is that Jim Le Bœuf himself, after threatening my life for two years because of his maniacal and groundless jealousy, made that appointment to meet me and make friends, and opened fire on Beadle and me. The truth is that Beadle shot him and killed him before I could make a move. The truth is that I wanted to report the whole thing at once. But Beadle argued me out of it, and he himself cut open Le Bœuf’s body and got the irons and tied them to it and sank the body in the water, and threw Le Bœuf’s pistol into the water just before we came back into Morgan City.

“ ‘That’s the truth, and I’m telling it to you on my last night alive. Why Beadle keeps on telling those lies I don’t know. I’ve prayed God that Beadle tell the truth. But it looks now as if I was going to have to die before he admits it.

“ ‘I was a fool that I didn’t go straight to the police and tell them the truth as soon as I got ashore in Morgan City that night. It’s hard to have to be strangled to death just because I listened to a murderer who said we’d never be out of trouble in our lives if I didn’t keep my mouth shut.

“ ‘I read the Bible a lot these days. And I’ve been reading about how they offered the bitter cup to Christ when He was on the Cross. It seems to me as if Mrs. Le Bœuf and I have had that bitter cup put to our lips three times now. Three times they have told us they were going to hang us on a certain day. Now they tell us we’ve got to hang Friday—and this time it seems as if they were telling the truth.

“ ‘I don’t want to complain too much, but there have been a lot of things in this case where neither Mrs. Le Bœuf nor I have had a square deal. And not the least of these things is the fact that to-day I find out I can’t see my son before I die.

A LOUISIANA TRAGEDY

“ ‘The boy had to leave medical college because of all this trouble. He went to work way out in West Texas, to start life all over again. He was here a couple of weeks ago when they said they were going to hang me January 14. Then somebody told him it was all right to go back to his job in West Texas. He’s out there now. I know now I’ll never see him on this earth again. The first he’ll know about it will be when he sees it in the papers, I suppose. I did want to see my son again before I died.’

“Dr. Dreher paused and drew a deep breath. ‘Well, good-bye, old man,’ he said, and again he thrust two fingers through the steel lattice in farewell.”

In England nothing whatever is known of what those unfortunates who are on the eve of execution feel and say. In English prisons, once sentence is given, the veil descends, and nothing more is known or heard. No doubt it is better so. On the other hand, if we still resolve to execute criminals, we should not shrink from knowing what happens to them after they have passed completely from the public gaze. But if this may not be learned from English experience, we may here, with advantage, study American customs. Poor Dr. Dreher probably talked as any man similarly situated would talk.

Meanwhile, a few feet above him, in a similar steel-latticed cage, Mrs. Ada Bonner Le Bœuf was passing her last hours :

“No merciful darkness shrouded them. Outside the latticed steel walls of the death cells, in corridors of concrete and steel, the electric globes burned nakedly. In the corridors the death watch drowsed.”

Perhaps we had better not describe this scene too closely ; how, while Dr. Dreher was calling for his son, his partner in tragedy was calling piteously for her aged mother : her

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

mother of seventy-nine, too prostrated with grief to make the journey.

She lies almost in a coma. She refuses a sleeping draught, refusing to go to sleep in case her mother should come. She accepts only a little aspirin.

"Beside her, with pitying gaze, sat Lavinia Robertson, the coloured night nurse who at dusk had relieved Gertrude Landry, the coloured day nurse. From time to time the negress with gentle hands reached over and smoothed the white woman's forehead or patted her on the shoulder.

" 'There, there, Miss Ada,' she would say."

And this poor woman, about to die, who a few hours before had said good-bye to her own four children, lies through the long hours of the night, immediately above the man who has shared her interminable months of agony, calling for her mother.

A few hours later, between noon and one o'clock, both had left that long agony behind them, but not before passing through moments of ultimate horror that may truly be called a climax to all that had gone before, terrible though that had been.

The account that describes their passing begins :

"Ada Bonner Le Bœuf and Dr. Thomas E. Dreher of Morgan City are dead. The first white woman in Louisiana's history has been hanged. Hardly had her body been borne from sight before the gallows on which she died felt the tread of her old family doctor."

If reticence was necessary before, it is even more necessary now. But one had better begin by saying that nothing in the history of the punishment of crime surpasses in horror these ultimate scenes ; that nothing later than the days of Tower Hill and Tyburn is more dreadful than this story of an execution in 1929.

A LOUISIANA TRAGEDY

"In the eyes of the law the death of James J. Le Bœuf, the woman's husband, has been avenged. And a sombre pall hangs over the little city on the Teche where those two died."

A group of perhaps a score is present at the final scenes ; official witnesses, reporters, doctors, sheriffs.

"Sheriff Pecot spoke to the group a moment, telling them how Dr. Dreher had asked the privilege of saying good-bye to Mrs. Le Bœuf a few minutes before, and how he had granted it. 'They just shook hands and said good-bye and God bless you,' said the Sheriff."

These witnesses see everything in terrifying detail ; not only the "steel trap" on which the two are to stand, but below the trap itself, where the victims hang suspended when they are dead.

They hear the murmured voices of Mrs. Le Bœuf and the priest who is with her in her cell. The cell below, where Dr. Dreher is waiting, is shrouded by a blanket. He cannot see anything. But he can hear a great deal. The group of witnesses stands waiting, smoking nervously. "Men who had forgotten to bring cigarettes borrowed them eagerly from those who had remembered." In their steel corridor they are almost in touch with everything : the two victims, the steel gallows.

"Then from a little side room, at twelve ten p.m., the New Orleans hangman entered. He was a strange figure.

"He was clad in wrinkled old brown trousers and unbuttoned vest and was in his shirt-sleeves. Only his mop of wiry grey hair and his staring eyes showed above an unclean and huge red-and-white figured bandana handkerchief, which he wore tied about his face, bandit fashion, and knotted behind his ears.

"The man was visibly nervous. He pushed hastily through the group in the corridor and scuttled up those ten steel stairs to the trap. There he stood for a moment peering furtively in through the openings in the latticed

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

walls of the cell. Then abruptly he sat down on one of the steel-pipe rails of the trap and leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, his head bowed. His hands clearly visible from below, with black and broken nails, were shaking like the hands of a man with a chill.

"The moments passed. They seemed like an age. Then suddenly the voice of Ada Bonner Le Bœuf sounded quick and shrill.

"'Is he out there now? Where is he? Has he come to hang me?' The voice of Father Rousseau could be heard, urging her to control. Then the sound of steps on that steel gallery came to the ears of the group below.

"A piteous procession came into view. In the lead was Mrs. Le Bœuf. Her eyes were blindfolded with a white handkerchief. Her masses of heavy black hair and her dead white skin showed strangely against the blindfold. She was clad in a faded pink wash dress that reached only an inch or two below her knees. It was more a housewife's mother-hubbard, slipped on for a morning's work in the kitchen, than it was a dress.

"She wore white silk stockings of the kind women buy at the marked-down counter of a department store. On her feet were soft black leather strap pumps.

"She was swaying with weakness. But she held her head high. Deputy Sheriff Arthur Martel, the jailer, was supporting her on one side. Sheriff Charles Pecot was supporting her on the other. They almost literally had to carry her along with their hands under her arms, and their arms behind her back.

"'Oh, mother! Oh, mother!' she was calling. And then: 'Oh, God, oh, my God!' Step by step, helped along by the two men, she made her way towards the death trap. It was a scant seven steps from the door of her cell. It took her a full minute to make that journey.

"At last she stood upon the trap itself. The hangman began to bustle about with cords to tie her ankles, to tie her hands behind her back and to lash ankles and wrists together by one heavy cord.

A LOUISIANA TRAGEDY

"She flinched when she felt those hands touch her ankles ; when she felt the rough cord through the silken stockings.

" ' Isn't this a terrible thing ! ' Her voice rang out hideously clear in indignant protest of womanhood at an alien touch."

There are other such details as she passes through those interminable moments when she stands there on the edge of eternity. . . .

"Again the woman's voice sounded strangely clear, terrible in its agony. ' My Jesus, I offer up my life to save my soul . . . '

"The black cap was drawn down over her face. One whole side of that black cap was slit. Jailer Arthur Martel worked feverishly to pin it together.

"Through the black fabric came Ada Le Bœuf's voice once more. ' The rope is so tight.' Suddenly she swayed far over to one side. Her legs were giving way beneath her. Arthur Martel caught her in his arms and held her up.

" ' Stand up, Mrs. Le Bœuf ! ' he implored. ' Stand up.' Her voice came faint and muffled through the black cap.

" ' Oh, I can't, I can't, I can't ! ' "

"Arthur Martel stood holding the sagging woman there, his own feet on the trap. Nerves tautened amid the crowd below. All was ready. The hangman stood with his hand on the lever in its steel case beside the trap.

" ' Over there ! ' commanded Sheriff Pecot, pleadingly. ' Stand over there, Arthur ! ' "

"He tapped Martel on the shoulder, indicated with his hands the place for the jailer to put his feet to get clear of the two doors of the trap. Martel shifted his feet. He stood there, braced, feet wide apart, holding a swooning woman in his arms.

"Somebody said, ' Now ! ' "

There is more, but we will leave it at that. Five minutes

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

later Dr. Dreher is brought forth. A steel door has shut off the sounds of much that has been happening, "but it had not been able to shut out the sound of the clanging trap." He bears himself bravely.

"His clean-shaven face was lean and pale with the prison pallor. His hair was brushed back, thick and greying, with careful grooming. He wore a dark grey tailored woollen suit and dark tan shoes. A quiet black-and-white four-in-hand scarf was knotted in a starched white collar. His big hands were steady. He seemed singularly composed.

"That man who, day after day, had wept and sobbed like a child in his cell, had found his reserve of strength and courage. He was marching out to meet his death like a man.

"Steadily, with unfaltering tread, he climbed those ten steel steps to the trap. Firmly he planted his feet in the middle of it. Then he looked down on the group some seven feet below him.

"Suddenly he spoke. 'God in Heaven knows we don't deserve this.' Silence for a moment. Then—'God forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"

A moment later he calls out to Rayne, standing below him: "Did you get my last message?"

He is referring to a statement, written late the night before, which he wishes to be "given to the world" in a Sunday newspaper.

Back comes the reply. "I got it. I'll give it out, as you asked."

" 'Thanks, old man,' said Dr. Dreher. 'Thank you and your paper for all you have done for us. You have been fair.' "

He turns to the jailer, who is busy as before:

" 'Mr. Martel,' said Dr. Dreher. 'I didn't think you'd ever be doing this.' "

A LOUISIANA TRAGEDY

"With difficulty he turned his head to look Sheriff Pecot squarely in the face.

" 'Mr. Charlie,' said Dr. Dreher. 'I know your heart is hurting you to have to do this.'

" 'It is,' said Sheriff Pecot, simply and feelingly.

" 'The rope is too tight round my neck, Mr. Martel,' said Dr. Dreher a second later.

" 'It's better to have it that way, doctor,' said Arthur Martel, earnestly. 'We want to make it as quick and easy for you as we can.' Dr. Dreher complained no more."

Strange, these little politenesses at such a moment. And yet how natural. On the one hand, the poor victim, doubtless hoping to the very last moment—even though he knows it is utterly hopeless—that there will be some sort of reward for amiability; the final flutterings of that same placatory spirit which prompts a delinquent originally to say "I'll go quietly" to the policeman. And on the other hand, these rough men, harsh and even brutal in the first moments of contact with one suspected of murder, but softening at the close, when they must perform the terrible task which is the final result of all their efforts. This same Sheriff Pecot was the man who had originally gone to Dr. Dreher's home and, as is the American way, put him through a "grilling" until he had obtained an admission that the doctor knew something about the death of Le Bœuf.

Later, one may read :

"Vacant to-night stand the two cells where Ada Bonner Le Bœuf and Dr. Thomas E. Dreher have lived and hoped, have wept and prayed and despaired these eighteen months. In the woman's cell still stands the little electric heater and the little electric stove, small comforts with which she tried to make that house of steel bearable. On the floor is a blanket, stretched as a rug,

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

soiled to-day with the trampling feet of many men. The narrow cot stands empty. Over it have fallen the tears of her mother and her four children. And tied to the steel wall beside it is a little bottle holding a small spray of leaves once green, now sere and dead. In Dr. Dreher's cell there are the papers and the magazines he read, the rough wooden table at which he wrote his last message to the world, to be printed after he was dead.

"And pasted on the steel corridor door of that cell is a picture cut from a newspaper. It is the picture of Governor Huey P. Long."

Here, then, is the brief story of an American tragedy, and its ending. The tragedy itself may be called an interesting one, for those who take interest in such things, and there are many who do. This story of the family doctor and his patient living in a remote country district of Louisiana, in which the flood-waters of the Mississippi played their part, has a quality that lifts it above the usual crime. It is the sort of crime which the amateur criminologist, who loves to re-tell such stories, might well dwell on, wondering even whether Mrs. Le Bœuf and Dr. Dreher were really guilty of murder. There seems to have been a certain amount of doubt about the fact that there was any real liaison between them. It would seem possible that what they had to confess to was bad enough for them to make no confession, hoping for an acquittal, and that when conviction instead came, the story which at first might have saved them had lost its power to help. In this there is a considerable resemblance to the position in which the young man found himself who is charged with murder—also on a lake—in the pages of *An American Tragedy*. And we may be sure that for long to come many people in Louisiana will ponder over the justice of a decision which sent the man Beadle to prison for life and Dr. Dreher and Mrs. Le Bœuf to the scaffold.

But here the interest lies not so much in the tragedy as in

A LOUISIANA TRAGEDY

the manner of its expiation ; not so much in the degree of guilt of these two people as in the manner in which they lingered and finally died. It seems incredible that such things can happen in 1929. America is very wide, and there are districts remote to a degree which English people cannot be expected to realise. Yet the place where all this happened was not so very remote. New Orleans is but a hundred miles away, and New Orleans is one of the oldest cities in the United States. It seems incredible that a population which contains so many humane and enlightened people could be anything less than horrified by suffering so long drawn out and so terribly consummated. . . . In Chicago the visitor may see hogs dispatched most neatly and efficiently. The putting to death of Mrs. Le Bœuf and Dr. Dreher was mediæval. Here is material for those people who do not believe in capital punishment.

But the most important point is that such things can happen in the United States, which Europe is being educated to believe is in the van of all that makes for the moral progress of the world. We hear much of how far America has progressed ; little of how backward she remains. There are many other incidents of life there which call for this same comment. . . . But perhaps, for the moment, we may leave it at that, and let the end of Mrs. Le Bœuf and Dr. Dreher tell its own story.

DIXIELAND

IF YOU ARE FORTUNATE you travel from New Orleans to Washington by the Crescent Limited, which is a very nice train—the engine, partially painted green, is a pleasant sight for English eyes—that lands you in the capital after two nights and a day of travelling, largely through that region loosely known as Dixie.

But before I caught this nice train, and while I was in the last throes of squeezing things into my trunk, an ordeal which never grows easier from practice, I received a call from a Southern gentleman. He was a real Southern gentleman, and a Colonel to boot. What is more, he brought with him a gentleman's gift—a bottle of Scotch whisky, unimpeachable as to pedigree, magnificent to view. This is the sort of gift that one hugs.

Imagine the scene :

“Curse this trunk. I've got too many clothes ! ” (The fair and just thing to say, by the way, would be “Curse these clothes. I haven't got enough trunk ! ”)

And then the ring of the telephone, and a few moments later the entry of my acquaintance, once met in New York, bearing his magic bottle. And who would not be glad to meet a Southern gentleman who is also a Colonel when, in addition to all this, he comes armed so pleasantly.

And if any reader of this peripatetic chronicle should think that, here and there, the arrival of such a bottle of whisky is somewhat unduly stressed, then all I can say is that he should travel the United States without one, and then he would be more charitable. (Unless, indeed, he is the sort of man to whom real whisky in a dry land would mean nothing, in which case his opinion does not matter so very much.)

DIXIELAND

Anyhow, with plenty of time to catch the train that would leave the South behind me, I talked with my visitor for an hour, during which time I learned much of a country that is an unknown land to most New Yorkers. How, for instance, although there is an amendment in the Constitution—the Fifteenth—which gives the coloured people the vote, the white inhabitants of the South contrive to see that no nigger ever does vote. Regrettable, no doubt, from a strictly legal point of view, but one must record things as they are. And who am I to preach to the white inhabitants of Louisiana?

This recalls a fragment of conversation I had with another acquaintance in a New Orleans street. A street car had passed, with its group of coloured people sitting in the rear seats. I had mentioned some of the differences I had observed, superficially, between the coloured people in the North and those in the South.

"You won't find that down here," he said briefly and simply. "There've been too many dead niggers."

Despite the radio, jazz bands, and other social improvements, the South remains the South. In a Fifth Avenue bus in New York, for instance, I found myself sitting between two fat negresses. The South would go up in horror at such an idea. . . . We have all heard of such things, of course, but the interest is none the less when one experiences them.

It is the same when my caller tells me stories of long ago in New Orleans, when gentlemen walked about with something even more deadly than a flask on the hip. We have all read of these stories, but how much more interesting to talk to one who lived them. I feel as he talks that he is sorry those days are gone. And I feel sorry that I have to be going so soon. It is ironic to have such a visitor in New Orleans, just when one is about to leave it.

However, when later I walked up and down outside the

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

train waiting for it to start, I felt quite calm even about leaving New Orleans. Much of the distaste for leaving any place is because of the trouble that is necessary in order to get out of it, to leave one bedroom for another. Once that is done—the packing and the rest—resignation sets in.

It had been faintly in my mind to pass by Birmingham, Alabama, where Florian Slappey and his tribe live. By this time I had abandoned the idea. I had seen sufficient coloured train-porters to harbour doubts as to whether the coloured residents of Birmingham would be quite so entertaining as Mr. Cohen makes them in his stories. Better leave Birmingham unexplored, and retain the pleasant illusion that its coloured residents bear some resemblance to those who live in the pages of the *Saturday Evening Post*. And even if I had gone to Birmingham, I couldn't very well have sat in Bud Peagler's Barbecue and Hot Dog Saloon, or whatever it is.

In the night we pass across a narrow section of the State of Mississippi and through most of Alabama. One must always miss something. But enough of Alabama is left over for me to realise that I am in the heart of Dixieland. It is a sign on a ~~wayside~~ gasoline station which impresses the important fact on me. And as the train rolls along one sees vignettes of that life which, via the Jewish song-writers of New York, has so thoroughly and sentimentally pervaded the music-halls of the world: wooden shacks, singly and in clusters, with coal-black mammies, piccaninnies, and mere niggers visible. One would say that there is rather more squalor than romance. But fortunately for one who would rather be pleasantly impressed than otherwise, the day is fine and the sky blue, thus justifying the advertisements printed in the North about winter in the South.

We run into Georgia. The earth is red, as in parts of Devon, the countryside rolling and quite well wooded,

DIXIELAND

although none of the trees are large. But it is quite a pleasant countryside, and we run through the equivalent of three or four English counties of this sort of thing. Always the grand scale. The road that for long distances runs by the railway track is plentifully scattered with Hot Barbecue booths, filling stations, and small road houses. For miles we are accompanied by the face, about twenty times life-size, of a beautiful girl who assures us that she smokes Dromedaries. For her sake one would smoke anything.

We stop at Atlanta, which looks like any other big manufacturing town. It is here that the great Federal Penitentiary is situated, where long-term prisoners live more like gentlemen than any other convicts in the world.

One small town after another. First a row of nigger shacks, then the larger frame houses of the whites, with porches and swinging chairs on them. At every station rusted Fords are standing with men who look like farmers from the surrounding countryside. But over it all, somehow, is the soft feel of the South. Perhaps the song-writers of New York occasionally take this same trip by railway, just to keep their local colour fresh.

Towards evening we cross over the wide Savannah River, and so into South Carolina. I think with some emotion of what the Governor of North Carolina said to the Governor of South Carolina, many years ago. Those times are dead. . . . And soon I shall see the last of Dixie, although that is not to say I shall hear the last of it.

Some day in the future somebody will no doubt say to me, "Did you go to South Carolina when you were in the United States?"

And I shall reply: "Oh yes. South Carolina, and North Carolina."

"And how did you like South Carolina?"

"Well, it was dark most of the time we were going through it."

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

"Really. Well, how did you like North Carolina?"

"I liked North Carolina very well. I was asleep."

Perhaps, on the whole, I had better not set up as an authority on the Southern States.

That night in the club car I sit down at a writing-table opposite a native of Georgia. By his speech and general manner he might just as well be a native of Surrey. He is drinking something out of a glass, with ice in it, and invites me to join him. As the White Rock is poured in—there is only one soda-water in all the United States, and you meet it in every city and every hotel bedroom—he explains that his drink is corn whisky, flavoured with Angostura to take away the taste of the corn. After one dose of it my private opinion is that it would be better to put more corn in, to take away the taste of the Angostura. However, it is whisky, and we talk European politics.

A little later I produce from my hip pocket a small tubby soda-water bottle, which I explain to him is filled with the very best Scotch, drawn from a larger bottle presented to me in New Orleans. I ring in turn for ice and soda-water. But my acquaintance politely refuses to join me. He explains that he is used to corn whisky now, and that it would not do for him to spoil his palate by taking one vagrant drink of the real thing.

There can be no doubt that he shows wisdom in this. With considerable resignation I pour out a drink for myself. I have none of his fears in this respect. Some day I shall be back in a country where a bottle of real Scotch does not affect one as would the discovery of ambergris on some lonely strand.

Much later I walk back some hundreds of yards along the train to find my Pullman berth. (This, I take it, would be in North Carolina.) Everybody has long since gone to bed. I pass through coach after coach, dim with half-lights, each

one a narrow aisle of green curtains, hiding the sleepers aloft and below. And utter silence—because after being in a train for a long time one ceases to notice the noise of it.

It is mysterious, eerie, almost. Each shrouded coach exactly the same. It comes suddenly upon me that I am lost—that I have no idea which my Pullman coach is. Not a sound, not a soul. The dark porters are nowhere to be seen. Somewhere behind green curtains lies my own empty bunk, but I cannot go along coach after coach, unbuttoning those green shrouds, looking for it. My coach had a name, but what on earth was it?

For a quarter of an hour, which seems an age, I walk up and down, homeless. Lost in North Carolina! I am a lonely wanderer in this city of sleep, which is rolling along to Washington at fifty miles an hour. Bank presidents, drummers, women going to join their husbands, husbands running away from their wives, pleasant people and unpleasant people—all neatly and silently tucked away as though they are laid in catacombs. . . . One long green aisle after another, and me feeling like a burglar at every step.

Suddenly a black face above a white jacket appears from nowhere. It tells me that I am in my own coach and standing near my own empty bunk.

Anyhow, I had an adventure in North Carolina. So to Washington in the early morning, where it is cold, and the frost of the North is in the air.

WHERE LINCOLN DIED

WASHINGTON, of course, is quite different from any other city in the United States. Everybody knows that, even the people who live in Washington.

It has a real guide book of its own, of a kind you might buy in London, Paris, or Rome, even if there is not so much of it. Here is a background of history, and the fact that it is only a hundred and fifty years or so in depth does not seem to matter very much. There is elegance, and people live lives of ease, much as some people still dare to do in Europe. There are diplomats and dinner-parties, and a monocle in the street would not cause a riot, even though it might excite a certain amount of compassion. The President lives there, and though in the process of becoming President he is merely a politician, subject to bitter and even scurrilous attacks from those who do not want him, once he is President he becomes America's First Citizen, and his wife is The First Lady in the Land. There's a divinity that hedges presidents as well as kings.

Washington also, in many aspects, is a really beautiful city. There was a lady, indeed, who said to me that it is the only beautiful city in America, but then she was a Washingtonian. There is the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, the Capitol, the White House, and many other buildings of national and historic import, including picture-galleries and museums. All of which have been described many times.

And in that extraordinary book, *The President's Daughter*, by Miss Nan Britton, we have a little touch of intimate history concerning the late President Harding, and not so well known, which invests the White House with something

WHERE LINCOLN DIED

of the flavour, and perhaps one might even say charm, of Versailles :

“ We had been waiting only a very few minutes when Mr. Harding opened the door, a door immediately behind and opposite his Cabinet Room chair. He greeted me cordially and instructed Tim (a secret-service agent) to remain in the Cabinet Room. Then I preceded him into a very small adjoining room, a room with one window. He explained to me that this was the ante-room, and crossed over to another door which led into his own private office.

“ Once in there, he turned and took me in his arms and told me what I could see in his face—that he was delighted to see me. Not more delighted, however, than I was to see him.

“ There were windows along one side of the room which looked out upon the green of the White House grounds, and outside, stalking up and down, face rigidly to the front, moved the President's armed guard. But in spite of this apparent obliviousness on the part of the guard, we were both sceptical, and Mr. Harding said to me that people seemed to have eyes in the sides of their heads down there, and so we must be very circumspect. Whereupon he introduced me to the one place where, he said, he thought we *might* share kisses in safety. This was a small closet in the ante-room, evidently a place for hats and coats, but entirely empty most of the times we used it, for we repaired there many times in the course of my visits to the White House, and in the darkness of a space not more than five feet square the President of the United States and his adoring sweetheart made love.”

And after all, if such affairs can happen with kings, and later be made the subject of memoirs, why should presidents be denied the same privilege? The good people of the United States have often enough found interest in the more intimate details of the lives of Europe's great. There is no reason why Europe should not return the compliment.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Mount Vernon, too—all the world knows of that, which would be very much worth visiting for its charm as an old colonial mansion, even if it were not also the home and the tomb of Washington. And Alexandria, on the way to Mount Vernon, with an "old-world charm" still showing in many of its red-brick houses, its old-fashioned Christ Church, and Carlyle House where General Braddock, come to America to assume command of the British forces, conferred with the Governors of six of the British colonies "to devise means for raising revenue for the support of service in North America." It gives one something of a thrill to consult an American guide-book concerning affairs that so nearly touch English history, to read: "To the Carlyle House came George Washington, summoned from Mount Vernon by Braddock, who offered him a commission as Major in the British Army, and it was in the Carlyle House that, contrary to Washington's advice, Braddock's disastrous expedition to Fort Duquesne was resolved upon." It is in such a place as Alexandria that one is inclined to muse on the theme of what would have happened to the English-speaking peoples if there had been no revolution; and also to think once again how much it was a family quarrel, British and British, and not, as modern America is too much inclined to think, a war between a country that believes in central heating and a country that (perhaps unfortunately) doesn't. When Washington lived at Mount Vernon (itself named after an English admiral) such things as San Francisco, Chicago, the Grand Canyon, peanuts, ice-cream freezers, and vacuum cleaners had never been heard of.

The intelligent visitor will not have been long in Washington before he makes his way to that old-fashioned red-brick house in Tenth Street, where, in a little room on the ground floor, Lincoln passed away, shortly after being shot in Ford's Theatre, immediately across the street.

WHERE LINCOLN DIED

As the tall President was carried out of the theatre, just after Booth the actor had shot him, a light was observed burning in No. 10 across the way, and into this house he was carried, being placed on the bed of a young man, a boarder, who, as a result of this, occupies his own niche in American history.

I found this room where Lincoln died the most historic spot in America. It was more alive with a great presence than anywhere else I visited, or anywhere else, I think, that could be visited; much more so than Mount Vernon, even though the furniture with which Washington was surrounded is all there. And so powerful is its historic appeal that it seems to belong to a past much more remote than is really the case. Because of this it is all the more surprising to find actual photographs of Lincoln, in his high hat, visiting the Army of the Potomac in 1862. Lincoln belongs to so long ago—or seems to do—that one forgets the camera was then invented. There he is, standing with a group of officers, and also seated with General McClellan in "Little Mac's" tent, with maps and plans spread before them. To me these slightly faded photographs came with all the shock of surprise with which I should have found a photograph of Napoleon at Waterloo, or Pitt leaving the House of Commons. Gladstone, Disraeli, and other great figures appeared in photographs. But somehow it is amazing to see Lincoln thus portrayed—Lincoln, who belongs so definitely to the past and to mighty events.

The tall curator who shows visitors round is steeped in his task. He talks in a hushed voice, as though the tragedy had happened not many days before. He heightens the impression that, historically, this is the holiest spot in the United States.

It was this curator who expressed his regret that the companion old-fashioned house to the left of No. 10 had not also been preserved. In its place was a very ugly and narrow

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

ten-story building. He also said that, although Ford's Theatre over the way was now a mere shell—though some day it will probably be a museum—there was an official caretaker there who would probably let me in if I knocked.

I crossed over and knocked. A man in a uniform not quite that of a policeman's, and holding a pipe in his hand, opened the big door. I spoke my little piece, and he asked me inside. He showed me what he was in charge of—a big barn of a place, with no semblance of a theatre left. But there was the doorway through which Booth rushed out, to where his horse waited at the back, although the stable is now an automobile filling-station.

Afterwards we talked in a small room with a stove, he with his pipe, I with a cigarette. He wore glasses and a bushy moustache, and something in the speech of this uniformed caretaker was curiously familiar. I was puzzled by it. And then he said :

“What's Wandsworth looking like now?”

So that was it! He was talking Cockney, pure and undefiled, but fainter with the passing of many years. Forty years he had been in America, and never been back to England, but the original speech of Wandsworth was still there. He was a pensioner with a house and a motor-car of his own, and the year before he had driven his wife up to Canada. He had been in the United States Army, and had been all over the country, in one capacity and another. He did eight hours a day at this lonely job of caretaking, because it was better than being at home all the time. And he was now an American, with no regrets.

“I'll tell you one reason why I like America. One man's as good as another here. If Henry Ford wanted to talk to me, he'd talk to me just as though I'm the same as himself, just the same as though I was one of those Congressmen up there. . . . He'd probably be nicer to me than to a Con-

WHERE LINCOLN DIED

gressman, just because I'm nobody in particular. You wouldn't get that in England."

It occurred to me that if in America one man is as good as another, there should be no room for condescension even from Mr. Henry Ford. But I didn't say so because I didn't want to disturb his theory, which must have been a very comforting one.

And despite his sturdy Americanism certain wistfulnesses crept out as we went on talking. He would dearly have loved to know exactly what Wandsworth was looking like, which was a question not easy to answer. And he admitted that perhaps some things were better in England.

"We don't shoot each other over there like you do here," I said, with a certain provocation.

"Ah, I could tell you something about that. There's certainly plenty of crime over here. Crime! . . . Funny thing. You see that tall building across the street—next door to the Lincoln museum. Well, at four o'clock yesterday afternoon I seen them carry a dead nigger out of there. He'd been dead since nine in the morning. That place on the first floor there is a gambling joint, and this feller was the doorkeeper."

I think of the hushed tones of the curator, as he described Lincoln's passing. . . . And a few yards away, through one wall, a few hours before, this nigger doorkeeper of an illicit gambling house being murdered. Strange juxtaposition, and yet so very typical of America.

It was all in the papers that evening, with various people being questioned. There was a story of somebody telephoning to somebody else, telling what had happened, and asking for instructions; and of the somebody higher up ordering that the place should be completely dismantled and abandoned. So that when the police arrived hours later, they found only the body of the nigger at the doorway, with everything cleared out of the "joint," and even the

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

telephone torn off the wall. . . . And this in stately and idealistic Washington !

On that day, too, the newspapers reported the seizure of a liquor plant in somebody's apartment, with three thousand quarts of liquor of varied denominations. All over the country, in the newspapers of every clime, one reads of these seizures. But somehow, in Washington, whence spring periodically those earthquakes of idealism which make Europe wonder dumbly how it is that all virtue has been monopolised by the land of big business, one expected to find things different. But there is no difference. Indeed, the innocent citizen is perhaps just as likely to be held up within sight of the Capitol as he is within sight of the Woolworth Building.

It was just at about this time that the "Wets" in Congress were demanding the voting of two hundred and seventy million dollars in order that Prohibition might be *enforced*, a proposal which the "Drys" easily defeated, voting a supply of only thirteen and a half million dollars for this worthy purpose.

Here is a situation much more than Gilbertian—the "Wets" demanding immense funds to make Prohibition a fact, and the "Drys" refusing. What at first sight seems very baffling is very easily explained. The "Wets" know that not even the expenditure of ten times two hundred and seventy million dollars would succeed in really enforcing Prohibition ; that nothing that the law can do will make America really dry. The "Drys" knew this equally well, and therefore would not face the further odium which the useless annual expenditure of such an immense amount of money would bring about. . . . Washington has its "secret diplomacy" no less interesting than that of Europe.

It was just after this period, too, that a New York news-

WHERE LINCOLN DIED

paper sent an investigator down to Washington to see how the bootlegging industry was progressing there. He found that the speak-easy did not flourish so plenteously as in New York, although there was no lack of them. One that he visited was run by a Chicago ex-gunman who was prepared to enforce his own closing hours at the pistol's point. But where he found Washington scored was in its splendid private delivery system. A call on the telephone to any one of many bootleggers, and a case of anything would be delivered within the half-hour. And like a good humorist, he even had a small parcel delivered to one of the police stations !

THE MURDER IN ROOM 349

IN WASHINGTON, in an hotel frequented by diplomats, the elegance of the capital and the members of a Pan-American congress—a hotel unimpeachable both in its prices and its appointments—I asked advice concerning what hotel to go to in New York.

“Why not go to our own hotel—the Cosmos Capitol” (as we will call it).

“But I don’t want to pay seven dollars a night. I shall be staying some time in New York. I don’t want to pay more than five dollars at the most. Four, if I can get a nice hotel for that.”

I was assured that for five dollars I should get a very nice room at the Cosmos Capitol. And since, when one is going to any big city, it is nice to know in advance roughly where one’s bedroom will be, I decided on the Cosmos Capitol. I was leaving behind me one of the smartest hotels in America. Its sister hotel in New York at five dollars a night sounded rather like a bargain. (What is five dollars for a bed and bath in America, where truck-drivers pay almost that much for an hour’s dalliance with the barber?)

So to New York—back to the great metropolis of a continent. And I was going to it now as one who knew it—slightly. As one, moreover, who had spent some months running round the United States. I should be a much more knowledgeable American arriving now at the cathedral-like Pennsylvania Railroad Station than the one who had originally disembarked at a pier in the Hudson River. Not so timid, in any way. Not likely to be so intimidated by noise or dubious-looking taxi-drivers or soaring skyscrapers.

So through a winter landscape and across a frozen

Delaware—though not quite so frozen as is shown in the famous picture of Washington crossing it—and on through New Jersey into New York, where a red-capped coloured porter gathered up the various effects of one who was becoming tired of living on his trunk. It would be nice to settle down in New York for a month, and not have to bother about trains any more, and know that one day one would merely have to take a taxi to a steamer, with Southampton as the next item of interest in the landscape. Journey's end—almost.

And in that moment of re-arrival in New York it was surprising how near England felt. It seemed to me that it was just at the other side of a ferry, that all that separated England and the United States, after all, was the mere price of a steamer ticket. This was due, no doubt, to the effect of having wandered about in California and other places far away. But it was surprising for how long this feeling persisted: for how long I felt that with only a steamer trip in between—a nice comfortable steamer trip, with dance bands and swimming pools mixed up in it—it was absurd that New York and London should not know each other as New York knows Brooklyn or London knows Brighton.

Forgetting for the time being that people pass their whole lives in London without ever going to Brighton.

Forgetting, moreover, that people pass their whole lives in New York without ever going to Brooklyn. However, for the moment, it was a very pleasureable feeling. London was just over the way. Hollywood was a million miles away.

There was something about the Cosmos Capitol that was definitely disappointing. Nothing like its elegant sister of Washington. Indeed, one could hardly imagine them belonging to the same family. Immensely tall, it was true: some thirty stories or so. And quite ornate, in an ornate sort of way. But not the same.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Nor were the people in it the same. No diplomats here. No dapper and spatted envoys-extraordinary from Pernambuco talking about Pan-America. A very curious crowd. Young, for the most part, and Jews for the most part. Young men in very flat derby hats (what England calls bowlers) and wearing those long coon-skin coats which fall without a break from shoulder to heel. And when their coon-skin coats were removed, they showed dinner-jackets (or Tuxedos if you like) with double collars round their necks, which is not correct evening wear, even if you do possess a coon-skin coat.

And their maidens very like them in style, but very highly coloured as to complexions and wearing very flimsy frocks. Hundreds of them, coming through the swing doors, passing in and out of the cloak-rooms, flowing into the elevators. I felt bewildered. For one who had come from one of the chastest haunts of the capital all this seemed very strange. Anybody will tell you that there are two million Jews in New York. But they nearly all seemed to be here in my hotel.

It was a Saturday night, and apparently there were various dances and reunions proceeding. Indeed, I step into the wrong elevator and find myself discharged at the thirtieth floor into a sort of roof garden amid a riot of young people.

I feel more and more bewildered, more and more alien. It should perhaps be mentioned that on my first arrival at the hotel I had refused to occupy the first two rooms shown to me. It was a new hotel, but there was a dubious air about these rooms; splotches on the plaster of the walls and a general air of being neglected. This was such an unusual thing in my American experience that I had politely but promptly protested. The young clerk at the desk was extremely pleasant when I said I was sorry to have to refuse the second room.

"Not at all, sir, not at all. It is for us to satisfy you." He came with me personally, and the third room we entered was more presentable.

Still, a mysterious something I could not quite understand about the whole hotel. An aura that did not please. And the coon-skin coats still arriving.

Later I am sending off a cable in the hall. The young man at the cable office is also very pleasant, and it is quite obvious that he does not wear a coon-skin coat, even when he is off duty.

"Who are all these people?" I ask him. "I can't place them. I'm out of my depth."

"Oh, this is where all the bootleggers, gamblers, and racketeers come to. They're all stiff with money, and this is where they come to spend it." A few words followed which had better be left out.

"I see." I began to understand.

"Don't you know," he went on, "that this is the hotel where Arnold Rothstein was murdered?"

Light burst upon me. In such moments as these simple Englishman and simple American understand each other with amazing ease.

"In Room 349," he went on.

"Good Lord! That's just near to me—I'm in Room 329!"

And realising now a great deal more about my surroundings, I went upstairs again to the third floor.

Opposite my own room a door suddenly opened, and a young woman appeared. If she was not a young person of what is known as easy virtue there is no virtue in ordinary intelligence.

"Are you the vally?" she said to me, abruptly.

"Not yet."

"Oh, I rang for the vally. I thought you was the vally." And abruptly she shut her door again.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

I walked along the corridor to Room 349. I had read so much about it, when in California and elsewhere, that the accident of my sleeping near to it possessed quite a considerable interest. It was at the end of the corridor—(*At the End of the Passage*—thoughts of Kipling)—situated in a corner, and in this direction one could go no farther. A discreet and in its way an isolated room. The very room for a tragedy. The slits of the ventilator in the door were open, showing nothing but blackness beyond. A dark and empty room, a room where a famous murder had been committed; a murder which had been discussed throughout the length and breadth of the continent, which had shaken up the underworld quite a little, which reverberated indeed through the *sous-monde*, the *demi-monde*, and the *haut-monde*, and was having, even at that moment, a quite definite effect on the politics of New York and its police department.

I felt more and more amazed that from my elegant hotel in Washington I had been sent to this one. What curious sisters. Still, in a way, I was grateful. One could not deny that this was interesting.

And, one might be inclined to say, what a striking miniature of America. This new hotel with its thirty stories, and its bath with every room, its scores of private suites, situated in the heart of New York—and a notorious gambler shot at the end of the corridor whose murderer it was the firm intention of everybody concerned, police and otherwise, never to discover.

This ever-recurrent theme in the great American symphony which must always be present in the mind of any inquiring stranger—of frontier conditions and the rule of the man who is quickest on the draw, living side by side with the highest ethical aspirations and the very latest thing in plumbing!

THE MURDER IN ROOM 349

I was staying in a hotel which probably contained more turpitude, actual and potential, to the square bedroom than any other large hotel in the civilised world.

The murder of Arnold Rothstein was something really interesting in murders, even for America. It so happened that I was in California at the time this famous gambler was "bumped off," but the noise of his passing lost little of its volume in its journey across the continent, and all the leading newspapers of the Pacific Coast paid him the tribute of big headlines and big "stories." All over the United States his obituary was thus featured—a tribute to the important fact that it does not matter so much what you are well known for, so long as you are well known.

For some days—particularly in New York—his passing was a subject for themes that were romantic and even pathetic. A great figure had gone, and Broadway was not the same. A gambler, no doubt, but even a gambler can be a fine fellow. Many stories were told of his generosity, his large-heartedness. A gambler, yes, but a "square shooter," and a man. The feeling was that the Bohemian world had lost one who would be sorely missed. Uplifting stories were told of him: as for instance that he always paid everybody who won at his gambling places. More than that, if a man won really heavily, Arnold Rothstein would depute one of his own special gun-men to see the lucky fellow safe home to his hotel. No question here of the man who had dared to win being sand-bagged or shot the moment he tried to get away with the money. Arrived at his hotel, the winner would gratefully bestow a hundred-dollar tip on his armed escort. Everybody, when Arnold Rothstein was about, behaved like gentlemen.

So the glad chorus ran for several days, mingled with a certain amount of legitimate curiosity as to who had shot him. Various people were known who were in the room im-

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

mediately before or after Rothstein staggered down the staircase with a bullet in him. The detectives were very soon on the spot. . . . But nobody had been arrested.

And meanwhile, full tribute having been paid to the deceased's more engaging side, a somewhat more rasping note crept into the newspaper accounts of the *affaire Rothstein*. The more his activities were probed, the more his various safes up and down New York were examined, the less the notabilities of Broadway felt that they ought to exhibit signs of uncontrollable grief at his passing. Rothstein, indeed, was disclosed as a real master of the underworld, up to every kind of villainy, hand in hand with every sort of desperado. A man arrested on a train, as a result of one of the documents found in one of the safes, was found to be carrying an immense cargo of cocaine. Our gentlemanly gambler was, among other activities, a dope king.

But still, despite perquisitions, nobody was arrested for his murder. By this time, of course, most people had realised that Arnold was no great loss to the well-ordered elements of the community. Still, an arrest does look well, especially when so many people were known who were with him somewhere about the moment he was shot. Therefore it was at once pointed out in the newspapers that, although the murderer was most certainly known, there was no intention of arresting him; that the departed Arnold's activities here and there touched too closely on city politics for it to be advisable to arrest his assassin.

So it drifted on, with the echoes of that shot in Room 349 still filling many a good column, with various explanations more or less convincing from the police, but still no arrest. . . . And then two months later a great change and sensation in New York. Mr. Grover Whalen, that very engaging personality, man-about-town, and official welcomer of all celebrities from abroad for Mr. Mayor Walker, had sacri-

ficed his £10,000 a year salary at Wanamaker's great store to become Police Commissioner. And immediately upon his arrival at police headquarters a terrific activity, so that hundreds of crooks were rounded up nightly (and released again), and later speak-easies were raided by the score, some of them being smashed up by police hatchets, just as in the brave old days of Carrie Nation.

Whereupon New York winked in its dry Manhattan way, and everybody said, including the newspapers, that this was all done so that the fact that Arnold Rothstein's murderer had not yet been arrested might be forgotten. . . . What England calls eye-wash, and what America calls apple-sauce.

Which, no doubt, was unfair to Mr. Grover Whalen; but he didn't seem to mind, and proceeded with his terrific activities: arresting, raiding, and smashing, and saying firmly that he would see that New York was made too hot to hold its crooks—much to the annoyance of Chicago's Chief of Police, who said that if any more of New York's gun-men came flocking to his own city he would promise them short shrift at the hands of the local gentry of the same profession. . . . Mr. Whalen also gave two conferences daily to the assembled newspaper men, promoted and demoted officers of all grades, and was photographed at very frequent intervals—at least twice a day.

Despite these many preoccupations he was good enough to find time to see me. I wanted very much to meet a man who was living in a whirl of criminality that made a mere Londoner feel dizzy; a man with his finger on events that out-flickered the crook films at every turn.

It was no small thrill to enter New York police headquarters for the first time, knowing that I was going to meet my first New York Police Commissioner—a man with a clientele that would make Scotland Yard faint. But the interview was not the success it might have been. So

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

impressed was I with the immensity of Mr. Whalen's task that once I had shaken hands with him and accepted his smiling invitation to sit down, I announced that I would watch the clock and rise the moment ten minutes had been ticked off. I was as good as my word, which was very foolish of me. . . . Still, I felt it was only good manners to do so, and in the presence of New York's *arbiter elegantiarum* one could not display too much of those. The main thing, after all, was to meet Mr. Whalen, the man who, fresh from a great department store and with a national reputation for elegance, could without the slightest check or difficulty adapt his notable organising ability to the needs of the greatest crime storm-centre—Chicago, perhaps, apart—in the world. Only America could show us that.

Thinking of the fate of Mr. Rothstein, and comfortably aware that my door was locked, I fell asleep in the hotel of Room No. 349.

It was somewhere round about half-past three in the morning when I sat bolt upright in bed, aroused violently in one flash of time from sleep to utter wakefulness. Where was I? What had done it? What had happened?

And then another shriek, so that I realised there had been one immediately before it: a piercing woman's shriek, shrill and staccato. Then another, a fourth and a fifth. . . . Then silence.

Five woman's shrieks, as staccato and arresting as pistol shots. My heart thumped as I switched on the light. What the devil did this mean?

I realised that the shrieks must come from the little lady who had mistaken me for the valet. Presumably she was being murdered.

In the singing silence that followed the last of her shrieks I listened intently. Not a sound. She might be dead.

I wondered what one did in a case like this. Should I,

for instance, lift up the telephone at the bedside and, calling up the office below, announce :

"I say, you seem to be having another murder here. Third floor. Opposite my bedroom. Perhaps you'd better see about it."

Or what ?

Should I pound on the door of the bedroom opposite, and demand to know what was happening ? Was that done in New York, near to Room 349 ? Perhaps not.

While pondering over these things I was listening intently for further signs of life. They came. The faint crying and stifled sob of the woman and the low growling voice of a man.

Not dead, then. Not another murder. I decided anyhow that it was their affair, and switching out the light went to sleep again. One quickly becomes adapted to anything. But altogether it seemed a quaint sort of welcome on my return to New York.

Next day, in the peace of Sunday morning, I quietly but firmly set out to find another hotel. I boarded a Fifth Avenue bus, and sat down next to the only woman I knew in New York. These things really do happen. Moreover, she bore a title, so that it was all the more surprising to find her in a bus. . . . And yet Americans say that the English are not democratic ! She carried me away at once to a pre-lunch cocktail party, where I found various people who knew people I had met in Hollywood.

Here also I met a New Yorker who told me that one of the saddest sights he had ever seen was the faces of the myriad workmen as they left one of the greatest motor-car factories in the world, where each man had been engaged on some small, simple mechanical task, hour after hour, and every day, and so on forever. Also of another great and famous factory—cash registers this time—where for greater celerity and efficiency everybody, from the highest

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

employee down to the lowest, ran about on roller skates, with slow tracks for those who were only in a normal hurry and speed tracks for those in a desperate hurry. And he did not seem to think that these things made for an ideal existence. It is my shrewd belief that he is not the only American who thinks in the same way.

Later I found my hotel.

"As near to the ground as possible," I said, feeling that a man who was so close to his steamer home ought to have done with express elevators.

They told me they could only manage it on the sixteenth. And as this hotel is situated in the only square in New York that still looks a bit like a London square, and was quite a long way from the bright lights and the high lights of Broadway, the sixteenth it had to be.

BACK TO METROPOLIS

AND SO, after circling the United States, back to my point of starting, and the inevitable comparison of my present impressions with that moment when I first made the acquaintance of New York, with that warning voice of well-meaning Americans in my ears, "Don't think that New York is America."

How right they were, and how absurd it is for the foreign visitor who knows something of New York to return to his native haunts and say, quite innocently, no doubt, "Oh yes, I know America"—meaning that he knows the United States.

Since then I had seen the vastness of Chicago, with what even a slightly jealous European eye must describe as its grandeur, and had learned the great lesson that it is not merely a large city of sorts considerably inhabited by gunmen. I had seen the picturesqueness of San Francisco on its splendid bay, a sort of smaller New York containing a much nicer-looking population. I had breathed the languor of Los Angeles, learning with the usual surprise of the explorer in those parts that this also is a vast city; I had tasted the special flavours of Boston, New Orleans, and Washington, and seen in addition many other cities and things, and great numbers of men and women living cultivated and metropolitan lives for whom New York is a city which may never be seen, as far away from where they live as Constantinople or Bagdad are from London. . . . How ridiculous to think that "New York is America."

And yet in many ways how true, after all. Once back in New York I realised how utterly this was the metropolis of the whole country, and how its influence penetrates every other city in the country, and even the remotest small

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

towns. Its magazines go everywhere, standardising ideas ; its slang invades the remotest recesses, standardising speech ; its melodies are in every home, standardising entertainment ; the very thought of Broadway, the Main Street of all America, thrills millions who are scattered far and wide. In vast regions there are myriads of people to whom a trip to Chicago is life's greatest adventure ; other regions, perhaps less vast, where Boston, St. Louis, San Francisco, or New Orleans represent all the fascinations of the "big city." But New York is this for the whole continent. Everybody wants to go to Manhattan, to walk down fabled Broadway, and bathe in the radiance of its Great White Way.

And when you walk down that Great White Way at night, what do you see ?

Something which is bright beyond imagination, so far as electric-light signs are concerned, but something which is amazingly garish, with a sort of Coney Island atmosphere, and the sidewalks filled by perhaps the most unimpressive population of any great white city, a crowd composed very largely of Central European Jews of fairly recent importation and various other dingy racial quotas.

An English acquaintance of mine, himself Jewish, was taken out of his hotel and shown Broadway, and asked what he thought of it.

"Put a roof on it," he said, "and it would be the greatest Fun City in the world."

To be in Broadway at night makes one a little sad for the sake of the human race. Here, in its way, is the highest expression of what is called the "lure of cities," which is composed principally of bright lights and animation, a promenade where people may walk, and look at each other. This is the sort of thing that youth, in hinterlands all over the world, dreams of at night. . . . Adventure, romance ;

BACK TO METROPOLIS

the dreams of girls about young men, and young men about girls.

Before the war brought changes, the Grands Boulevards of Paris undoubtedly made the finest popular promenade in all the world. They indeed might have been called the Main Street of the Universe. Paris still has the Champs Elysées. London, despite its many charms, has never possessed such promenades as these.

Broadway, then, stands supreme in the world to-day for the fascination of life as expressed in candle-power. . . . And it suggests a Fun City, drab, despite its brightness, and thronged by the inhabitants, principally of small stature, of a modern ghetto.

One begins to understand why Americans who do not happen to belong to New York protest to the stranger that New York is not an American city. It is the inhabitants to whom they are referring, and not the city. . . . Judged by its skyline, indeed, it is the most American thing in all America.

But as regards its population it is still Zangwill's "Melting Pot," and the process of melting has still a very long way to go, perhaps several hundred years. . . . It is very possible indeed that the melting process will never be properly accomplished.

There are, one is told, two million Jews in New York, principally Russian and Polish. Added to these are nearly a million Italians, and heavy contributions from many other "foreign" nations. The America that the average Briton thinks of, the America of English speech and of many ideas and ideals that spring from what after all is the parent stock, and the dominating stock, of nearly all the United States, is practically swamped in New York by all sorts of elements which should have been admitted sparingly, and not on a flood tide.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

For some reason difficult to explain, this is regarded as a subject which is almost taboo as a matter of discussion in print. One may often hear New York referred to in conversation as Jew York, but one does not read it. And yet it is the greatest fact about New York, that this is the largest Jewish city the world has ever known, inhabited to an almost preponderating extent by the recent descendants of the squalid ghettos of Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Roumania, and elsewhere.

From out of this mass of immigrant Jews emerge individuals who make worthy, even splendid citizens. Men who become millionaires, and philanthropic millionaires, who create great businesses and found great institutions, who do what outstanding Jews have done through all time. But the mass remains, and there is too much of it. However busily the "Melting Pot" may seethe, it simply cannot hope to catch up with its business of refining until very many generations to come.

And here we are confronted by America's greatest problem and perhaps the greatest tragedy of its kind in the history of civilisation. To be the country she might have been, America's quota regulations ought to have come into existence sixty or seventy years ago. But the great country was there, hungry for exploitation and population; nobody saw what the future would bring, and so the scourings of every low-grade population in Europe, peoples unwashed and unknown, were poured in, like a Mississippi flood, and to-day the real Americans, the real "One hundred per-centers" who are not always talking about it, live, more or less dismayed, amid an all-pervading, all-encircling wash of other nations.

Had that unfortunate immigration been controlled years ago, and restricted to manageable proportions, the United States would not to-day be quite so rich, their population would be some scores of millions smaller, and they would

BACK TO METROPOLIS

not have been able to claim, as they do, that theirs is the leading country in the world. But they would have had a compact and homogeneous population of infinitely better quality, and would really have been a nation. As it is, America, which was originally born of Anglo-Saxon parents in 1775, and re-born, still of the same parents, in 1861, must now, as a result of the immense influx of low-brow European elements, go through a very prolonged period of gestation before she can finally emerge as a nation in the sense in which England and France, Italy or Spain, are nations.

Added to all this, the United States, as everybody knows, have the coloured problem. Here the fault originally lies with England, very old England, but it is so far back that it is difficult to know where to begin to chide, and to blame anybody now for the old slave days would be equivalent to growing indignant because women had no votes in the time of Henry VIII. And though England no doubt began it, those English-Americans or American-English who lived in the South for a hundred years or so before the Revolution came, perpetuated the idea with enthusiasm. They did so for long after they had become Americans. Not only, indeed, did these Americans of the South desire to retain slavery, but they also desired to extend immensely the territorial area of its operation—a national dissension which was only settled by the Civil War.

So that it is no good blaming anybody over the question of America's black populations and its problems, the blame being so nicely apportioned. It is all just a bit of the bad luck of history.

All this, the problems of alien elements and of a coloured population, would really be strictly America's affair but for one thing. That one thing is the question of international politics. When the President (or Mr. Brisbane) addresses a hundred and twenty millions of Americans on great

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

questions such as national defence or idealism, or the absurdities of European diplomacy and militarism, to whom is he speaking? And when Europe or England is bidden to hearken unto the voice of America, which we are now told is the voice of the greatest nation in the world, from whom does that voice proceed?

A stroll along Broadway suggests various answers to these questions.

Very near Broadway I turn into that most astonishing of all picture palaces, the Roxy.

To say that it has the vastness of a cathedral does not convey enough. American buildings have put this simile quite out of date, and in future cathedrals will have to depend for their impressiveness not on size but on beauty, and other attributes, which is perhaps nothing to worry about so far as the cathedrals are concerned. Yet the fact remains that an acquaintance with American architecture must have a permanent effect on one's appreciation of the great historic buildings of Europe. Something has gone from them: the power to impress by bulk or height.

Up a staircase grandiose in proportions I arrive in a vast amphitheatre, which is quite unlike any other ever seen. Far, far, to right and left it stretches. Away down below is the stage, a very large stage, but looking quite small. The film part of the programme happens to be banal enough, although there is a touch of humour to an English mind in one of the pictures. It shows the young half-hero arriving at an American military college. He wears a derby hat (*Anglice* bowler), and this, coupled with the fact that he has passed some time in England, stamps him at once as a somewhat effeminate kind of young man. Poor lad!

However, there was much more beside the pictures; the numerous orchestra, that rose and fell on its wide platform, together with a vast organ (or perhaps there were two), and

BACK TO METROPOLIS

various costume tableaux that were beautifully staged. A number of these portrayed old nursery rhymes, stories and fairy tales, accompanied by traditional English airs, and embellished by the beautiful costumes of olden days. Everything admirably done, and all for half a dollar admission, which made one realise what the theatre has to contend with nowadays.

And looking down on all this, as one of this vast audience of New Yorkers, it occurred to me that everything that was there being presented derived directly from England or Europe, and was yet as familiar to this mixed American audience as peanuts or ice-cream sundaes. Thinking it over, indeed, one realised that there is hardly anything that matters that we have not given to America.

And musing on this theme the vision of the young man in the bowler hat came to me again, and this curious idea which is so persistent in America that there is something faintly derogatory about things English. That business of the Great War for instance, concerning which America has never yet begun to nibble at the edges of reality, as far as England's part in it is concerned, and probably never will, and presumably doesn't want to.

After all, England has been to America very much what Ancient Greece was to the scattered Hellenes. When the Great War exploded, and England so quickly and so resolutely walked into it, it would not have been so very surprising if this big America had said: "Well, here's this little country, which as we know is rather old and tired now, taking on something which she probably won't be able to manage. We've had our troubles with her in the past, but after all she is the fount of all that made us, nearly everything we have of law, language, literature, poetry, and all the rest came to us from her, and we're wiser now, anyway. . . . We must see that whatever else we do to help her, she has our sympathy and understanding from the start. Even if

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

she is old and tired she's still got some of the old pluck left."

And England in the war, instead of falling by the way, rose to immeasurably greater heights than she had ever done before, so that the heart of America ought to have been immensely thrilled and proud to realise that the stock from which she sprang—this old stuff of Chaucer, the Black Prince, Milton, Marlborough, Shakespeare, and all the rest—had "measured up" to ordeals never before imposed in military history, and triumphantly surmounted them, and indeed in her several ways, even if she did not "win the war," done much more towards that triumph than any other nation.

Instead of which America turned a cold eye on British activities from first to last, and since ; showing that same grudging spirit to the British war effort which found its highest or lowest expression in the glacial attitude of President Wilson. There was, to begin with, that great élan for France, based on the Lafayette tradition. How well I remember reading in a New York newspaper very early in the war that, whatever America did for France, never would she exact the return of a penny. It was an enthusiasm that faded away quickly enough under the realities of contact, particularly after the United States themselves entered the war. To-day there is less Francophilism in the United States than there has ever been since the days of Yorktown, America being the latest nation to discover that, however sentimental other countries may be about France, France is never sentimental about other countries.

But in America's case the reaction from this rosy rapture was too violent, too crude. During the war years and ever since, England has had to put up with many tantrums from France ; has had to soothe her, keep her gentle and good. She has hardly ever dared to mention, very diffidently, that she would like a little on account of the enormous amounts owing to her. From first to last, in this question of the war

BACK TO METROPOLIS

and its aftermath, France has treated the country that maintains 750,000 of its own graves in French soil with a studied disregard and ingratitude that would have been comic had it not been so expensive. And yet England still feels it her duty to work up a sentimental regard for France, and at a pretty ceremony in Paris, some eight or nine years after the war was over, Sir Austen Chamberlain said emotionally that one loves France as a man loves a woman. . . . If France is the "gold digger" among nations, Britain is certainly the "sugar daddy."

In view of all this, perhaps one must admit that America's attitude to France has more to commend it than Britain's. America's severely business-like attitude since the war (on the question of war debts, for instance) has brought her more protestations of affection from France than has all England's patience, generosity, and sweet reasonableness. If there is ever a Franco-American ceremony in Paris, whether concerning visiting legionaries or whatnot, there is always the underlying suggestion that Lafayette and Yorktown matter more than any memories of alliance with Britain in the somewhat larger war that happened more recently. Britain indeed is very much cold-shouldered in any such gatherings as these, and Marianne cannot say enough that is charming about her very business-like creditor, Uncle Sam. . . . In fact, the cynic might say that in this respect at least America understands just how a woman ought to be treated!

But though all these things are true, they are not true of all Americans. There are very many of the "old stock" who felt very differently about Britain's participation from the first, who saw the real truth of the fight we were waging, and who would have been in it themselves very early had their views prevailed. But they were in a hopeless minority. Against them were, first, those also descended from the "old stock" who, unfortunately, cherish that curious and

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

unreasoning hostility against England—not Scotland, Wales, or Ireland—which shows itself in so many ways, an emotion based almost wholly on the distorted Anglo-American history so long and so deliberately served up in the American schools. And second were all those millions of every possible race, but politically known as Americans, who, having no connection of any sort, historic or other, with England, naturally do not care twopence about her, except that, having been taught that it is the correct thing to dislike or even slightly despise England, on the whole do so, with what under any sort of provocation can become a considerable heartiness. . . . Not forgetting, of course, the Germans and the Irish.

And this really is, and probably for long will be, a synopsis of the normal political situation between England and the United States. Always there is the small minority of real Americans of British stock who cherish no absurdities regarding Anglo-American history, who really do deeply value their origin and their own inalienable and equal share in what, for brevity, one may call the Shakespeare idea, and who regard any suggestion of conflict with Britain as not only "unthinkable" but idiotic. This is the type the English visitor to America mostly meets, and is charmed to meet. The revelation of the community of speech and thought is so astonishing and complete that the visitor may easily come to believe that he has not left home. Indeed, the "reactions" of such Americans to contact with English people are so warm and generous—even though their own keen nationalism is always there—that the visitor may be pardoned if he feels a very deep and softening glow of sentiment.

But against them are all the others, and there are very many more of them.

The effect is that though in any international "situation" the United States, wholly and politically considered, might show reasonable patience or restraint with any other nation,

BACK TO METROPOLIS

she would probably, if any such situation arose with England, be prepared to show very little. There is the famous Sackville-West case, in which the British Minister at Washington, as the result of a trap deliberately laid for him, and with no desire to be anything more than amiable, gave a correspondent his own opinion as to how it might be advisable to vote in a forthcoming Presidential election. Slightly foolish, no doubt, but no more; a letter written by a gentleman who was under the impression that he was writing to at any rate an honest person. The result, as we all know, was appallingly explosive, and the British Ambassador—or Minister, as he was then—was handed his papers. Yet he had simply been the victim of a base trick, of which the American Government might have been ashamed to take advantage. But he was English, and that was enough. . . . It might have been as well if England had shown herself in no too great a hurry to send another ambassador to take his place and run the same risks.

We may contrast with this—and it is the sole reason for the exhumation of an old story—the treatment which Count Bernstorff, the German Ambassador, handed out to America during the war. This urbane representative of “kultur” pursued his plotting for years, openly and unchecked, surrounded by spies engaged on activities affecting the security and the sovereignty of the United States which read like a secret-service novel. To him America showed infinite patience, a divine forbearance, and when, after years, he and his warren of espionage had to be cleared out, because America was at last entering the war, he apparently left very many warm friends behind him.

One can imagine—or, rather, one cannot!—what would have been the effect in the United States for *all time* on Anglo-American relations if a British Ambassador had been detected in a plot to cripple America’s munition output and blow up the Welland canal.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

This is indeed where one may for once write with full truth that the imagination boggles at the idea.

Having seen two hours of the Roxy programme without the enjoyment of a cigarette, I set out to find where in this vast palace of popular entertainment one might be permitted to smoke. Down a staircase such as Louis XIV might have thought a little too magnificent I descended to the immense central hall. Here, in a space big enough for an international exposition, I felt that a cigarette might do no harm. But a glittering page-boy said that smoking was not permitted there. I must descend farther. So to an underground chamber, where in a very dim light—the pleasant idea of subdued interior lighting is often pushed in America to extremes—the patrons of the establishment were waiting in a long queue for free coffee from a buffet.

Here I felt one might smoke in safety. But no, not yet. A small and dimmer chamber, farther on, just outside the "wash-room"—a place, by the way, free of towels, where you dried your hands in streams of hot air.

Here some three or four of the thousands of people in the house were smoking in a subdued fashion. Except in every variety of eating establishment, where everybody smokes throughout the meal, smoking in American places of entertainment is treated as an anti-social act. Possibly this ruthless repression of the male is a reaction from the days of the cuspidor, which now is rarely seen. If so, there is something to be said for it. But more probably it is a manifestation of that feminine power which rules the United States. Woman is supreme, and just as the entrance of a woman into an hotel elevator freezes the men into worshipful immobility, so it cannot be permitted that in any place of entertainment the sex shall be outraged by the curling spirals from a cigarette.

From the Roxy, and the incandescent glare of Broadway,

BACK TO METROPOLIS

I departed to a club, which amid much that was so strange was a home from home: a place where artists, actors, writers, and others met, and where the atmosphere was very much what one would find in London. It was a night devoted to an annual ceremony, and everybody would be there; a dinner-jacket night, in what had been an old-fashioned residence—1830 or thereabouts—of many memories. It is not easy to find this sort of thing in New York.

A buffet, most beautifully arrayed, punch, the chatter of men, many well-known in the arts, all interested in more or less the same things, and about as much American accent, all told, as would fill a cocktail glass. In short, although ninety-five per cent. of all these men were Americans, the gathering might have been in London, which is not intended as a compliment or otherwise, but merely as a statement of fact.

At a rather later stage in the proceedings somebody sat down at the piano and began to play Gilbert and Sullivan. And instantly the choruses were taken up, vigorously. Everybody knew them.

“That every boy and every gal, that’s born into this world alive,

Is either a little Liberal, or else a little Conservative.”

Strange to hear that in New York. And things stranger were to happen.

Still later another member went to the piano and began to play and sing various songs of Kipling’s, mostly to his own settings. He was a Kipling “fan.” He knew everything, and his audience seemed to know almost as much. “Danny Deeever,” for instance, was a great success. His audience knew that thoroughly. They had all read *Barrack Room Ballads*.

And then, after a time, he played and sang “Route

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Marchin' " to a setting of his own : a wonderful setting, martial, rollicking, and inspiring, so that it caught the very spirit of a British regiment marching along the Grand Trunk Road across dusty India. And this proved to be the great success of the night, so that he had to sing it again and again, and every now and again somebody was found who hadn't heard it, so that he had to play it once more ; and men, youngish and middle-aged, likewise old and grey, were standing round the piano with shining eyes, singing :

" We're marchin' on relief over Injia's coral strand
Eight 'undred fightin' Englishmen, the Colonel and
the band."

Which, as something that happened in Lil' Ol' New York, was really very astonishing, and Heaven only knows what keen atavistic emotions these words were arousing in the breasts of men whose connection with England was for the most part very far back indeed. Perhaps the music was responsible for it. But not altogether. Here was as striking an example as could be found of that power of a common race, language, and literature which, whatever other factors may always be present to weaken and confound it, must always be taken into account in any discussion of Anglo-American relations.

England again ! . . . One can never get away from it in America (even though in this case the inspired pianist was of Scots descent). Nowhere in England could there have been a keener response to those songs. Probably nowhere in England could there have been one quite so keen and heart-felt, because in New York there was an added something that no merely English audience could have felt : the awakening in men of deep sentiments that are not taken for granted, and are not in daily use, and so make themselves all the more powerfully felt when some unusual emotion or occasion rouses them.

BACK TO METROPOLIS

Like being at home, only rather more so. "Came the dawn"—or very nearly—and the concert was still going on. New York, when it is amusing itself, keeps later hours than London. And I could not help reflecting, as the music and the wassail continued, that three or four blocks away from this spontaneous English festival I should find myself in the midst of a teeming population of "foreigners" who had quite possibly never heard the name of Kipling, who certainly would not be sentimentally thrilled by any English song whatever, and who yet, politically, were as American as any of these men gathered round the piano.

Which brings us back, inevitably, to what is after all the dominating factor in Anglo-American relations: this loose mixture of the old stock that founded and carved out the country, and still is the real backbone of it, with all those other alien races which decade after decade were poured in from the steerage, their bundles in their hands and their kerchiefs round their heads, like so much dumped merchandise.

It is probably the strangest situation which has ever arisen in all the history of civilisation. And one often wonders what the "real" Americans think about it, this forced acceptance as political brothers and sisters of the sweepings of Europe. A little at a time would have been all very well. But the flood—economic statistics apart—has been disastrous.

And indeed there is no need to wonder what such Americans think of it. One knows. Quite often an American of this type unburdens himself, and you learn that what politicians at Washington grandiloquently say about the proud fact that there are a hundred and twenty millions of "Americans" in the United States finds no echo in the hearts of real Americans, except one of regret and anger that Al Capone, millionaire master gun-man of Chicago, Arnold Rothstein, king of everything that is crooked, and millions

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

more, Dago, Levantine, and all kinds, should be known to the world as Americans.*

The famous "Melting Pot" has not yet done its job. It is doubtful if ever it will. But even if ever it does, the results of such a wholesale refining lie much too far in the dim future to possess any possible interest for any real American alive to-day. He must go on living with the strangest medley of races ever grouped under one flag, and making what personal compromise he best can between his own natural patriotism and the sad but unalterable fact that millions of his fellow-citizens are as foreign to most of the things he really cares about as Chinese.

All this did not matter so much to the world in general in the days up to the Great War, when the United States was still regarded by everybody—even those who lived there—as a nation still in the making, with some way yet to go before the job was done. But it matters more now, since the war brought about that immense change in the relative importance of nations which put the United States so much in the limelight and almost forced on her the rôle of being the "leading nation of the world." It is a rôle which the majority of Americans take up with enthusiasm and about which they have no misgivings, despite the astonishing crime records of the country and its multiplicity of internal problems and imperfections. But here precisely is where the thinking American, who is not necessarily a politician by any means, is not so happy about the part his country must play. It is all very well on paper—and in some of the newspapers—but the Americans who matter most know that a very great deal of it is what they themselves call "the bunk."

* What America thinks about it is further, and officially, shown by the new quota regulations introduced in July 1929 under which—on the basis of racial origins at the time the U.S. became a nation—the British quota was raised from 34,007 to 65,721, and the quotas from other nations, including Ireland, were correspondingly cut down.

BACK TO METROPOLIS

A month in New York—and how much has one seen?

Really, astonishing though it may sound, there is very little to see—or, perhaps one should say, very little to explore. There is magnificence, but it is of the panoramic type. The Skyline is best treated as a mountain range. In its right perspective it is splendid, but explore it in detail, and what do you find? Office desks and card-index files on the fourth floor just as you would on the fortieth. That is to say, a skyscraper, however impressive, is just a collection of offices, eternally—and perhaps infernally—repeated. There are moments when the fifty-story office tower of the Chanin Brothers seems to cease to be something that is the work of man, and belongs to Nature. See it against a pure blue sky, with its stonework gleaming in the sunlight. On another tower almost as high I stood at night and saw the wonder of New York with its lights spread below me. There is nothing else like it on earth. It seems as though one has been transported to some city of the future. Metropolis. Just that.

But one cannot repeat this indefinitely. One cannot live, spiritually, on the Skyline, and its effects, below or above. And yet it is undoubtedly the finest aspect of New York. It is New York.

Otherwise the city is amazingly barren, at any rate to the stranger, despite so much interior luxury. There is so little to explore. One goes to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, of course, but that is the highest adventure of its kind you can take. The rest is really the streets, those maddening and wearing rectangular streets, with incredible vistas of avenues that appal. And yet there is nowhere else where vision and planning have been so bold.

One may only know a city by walking about it, by mixing in its crowds on foot. And after the first week's experience of New York this produces nothing but fatigue. There is

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

nothing to discover, nothing which suddenly charms or surprises, nothing unexpected round the corner.

In that curious but interesting book, *The President's Daughter*, by Nan Britton, which has already been mentioned, President Harding one day says to his sweetheart, apropos of travel outside the United States : " I'd just love to see your face, dearie, when you saw London." It is a remark which warms one considerably towards that rather pathetic figure, who bemoans that the White House is just a prison, and whose average remark, as reproduced by his adorer, who is something of a female Boswell, is not much above the mentality of a clerk in a small-town drug-store.

In saying what he did about London he was expressing the hunger that so many Americans feel for something that cannot be found in their own cities and is found so plentifully in England and Europe. One cannot understand this hunger without having stayed in American cities.

It is very odd, this barrenness of New York. To the stranger who is alone there is nothing at night but Broadway or one of its theatres, unless of course he is saved by the company of friends, which is a factor that is constant for any city in the world. He cannot wander about, even if there was anything to find, more or less at his own sweet will. He cannot set out alone to explore a selected few of New York's twenty-five thousand speak-easies, or dive down into places of entertainment, restaurants, night clubs or whatnot, just as the fancy takes him.

The reason for this is a very simple one. There is one aspect of life in New York, or any other American city, which no stranger can afford to ignore, and that is the question of safety.

Anywhere that is ever so little off the beaten track, at night, may bring adventure of a kind that is not worth having. One need not be unusually nervous to feel this. It is a matter of sheer common sense.

BACK TO METROPOLIS

Put such an idea to a New Yorker, and he will laugh.

"I've been thirty years in this city, and never seen a hold-up."

True enough, no doubt, although he will talk quite differently if the question of crime crops up in the ordinary way, as it does frequently.

In any case, the point of view of the stranger and the native must be widely different. The native knows exactly what, or what not, to do. The stranger doesn't. What is more, the stranger must betray himself as a stranger, which may at any moment make a difference. And in any case, if he has any sense he will so "watch his step"—that watchword of all America—that he will do anything reasonable in the way of precaution to avoid the possibility that at any moment some undersized ruffian may accost him with the classic words :

"Put 'em up !"

Which may be described as the other watchword of America. And in America, if you are told to put 'em up, you must. That every American firmly believes and preaches, and there can be no doubt that, with crime what it is and criminals what they are, it is sound sense. The slightest delay in putting 'em up may mean instant death ; or more likely a lingering death, because it is the fond habit of the average United States bandit to shoot in the stomach, which is easy to hit, certain in its results, and doesn't even give him the trouble of raising his arm.

Thus, whatever the chances are of meeting with such an adventure—whether moderate or only slight, the traveller in America, or the explorer of American cities, must bear the possibility in mind. He simply cannot afford to take the chance that the next thing his relatives will hear of him will be a cable announcing his demise. If one goes elephant hunting one expects to affront a certain amount of hazard. But there

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

is no sense in meeting it in places where the clang of the street-car gong may be heard, and where a few yards away late revellers are consuming ice-cream sundaes and coco kolas across the counter of a drug-store.

Talking on this subject with me—and I am willing to admit that the question of crime interested me more than any other in America—a New Yorker who would not hear of any idea of danger in his own city told me how bad things were in Chicago. (New York is always willing to concede this of Chicago, and what Chicago says of New York makes just as strong reading.)

"In Chicago," he said, "a man will walk alongside you on a crowded street in daylight and, keeping step with you, just poke his pistol into your ribs. And when he tells you to hand out what you've got, you've just got to do it as quietly as you can. If not you're dead, and there's no use in being killed, because there's nobody will bother to avenge you."

In New York, a week before I left it, a cashier stepped out of a street car in the centre of the city. The time, afternoon, and the pavements crowded. For greater safety he was carrying a handsome "pay roll" of banknotes stuffed into his pockets, this being a ruse to pretend he was any ordinary person and not a cashier.

But it is the business of New York bandits to circumvent this sort of thing, and possibly somebody in bank or factory had "tipped off" these particular rascals as to how the money was carried. As the cashier reached the pavement he felt a pressure in his back and a voice behind told him to walk quietly and make no fuss. Two men fell into step with him, one on each side. The pay roll was quietly extracted. Then came the further order—"Walk two blocks without turning your head. . . ."

The coup was quite successful. This is what may be called efficiency.

BACK TO METROPOLIS

One of the sights which at first most astounds the innocent visitor consists of those green-painted armoured cars, the property of the United States Trucking Corporation, which drive up and down New York carrying valuables for banks and other places of business. An armoured truck draws up outside a bank. The steel door at the back opens, and out step two young men, dressed rather carelessly in a sort of chauffeur's uniform. One carries a book, the other a parcel of sorts. The hand of each rests on the butt of a heavy automatic, carried openly in a holster. New York does not look at them.

One day I saw two such young men coming out of a jeweller's shop. One of them was carrying his naked automatic in his hand, ready for instant business.

I saw one of the armoured trucks draw up outside a big bank in Fifth Avenue. The pavements were busy with people. One of the young men was no more than nineteen, very like Harold Lloyd, with horn rims complete. They are all very young men.

They disappeared into the bank. Nothing happened. But had anything untoward occurred there would have been instant shooting, and very likely some half-dozen pedestrians would have been hit in the process. The young men in uniform have apparently unlimited discretion—or lack of it—in such an event, and anyhow pedestrians do not matter overmuch.

Looking back on that month in New York, with its mixture of sightseeing, occasional dinners with friends, a theatre or two somewhere near the Great White Way, an interesting afternoon in the Tombs prison, the hospitality of a very pleasant club, a few visits to speak-easies, with some stretches of boredom, there is one night that stands out as the sort of pleasant experience that it would be good to find in any city.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Four of us—a New Yorker, a Virginian, an Australian, and myself—and the sudden proposal that we should go under the river to Hoboken, there to see the presentation of an old-time melodrama, as it was done forty years ago ; so that what was then taken seriously should now be laughed at, on the lines of similar productions at London's Elephant and Castle theatre in recent years.

Under the river to New Jersey ; the first time I had stepped ashore in a State which, though so near to New York, is in many ways very widely different in its laws. For one thing New Jersey is much more " open " as regards its liquor restrictions.

The melodrama was a great success. Sitting in a box we hissed the villain, applauded the heroine, and behaved generally as did the rest of the audience. Most of the people there had come over from New York. It was in its way, indeed, a slightly highbrow gathering. The theatre was exactly like one of London's old-type suburban houses. It was one of those rare occasions when one might have been in London, with no suggestion of anything foreign in any detail.

My New York friend happened to be quite a well-dressed man. He has also been to Europe on several occasions. And he was wearing a smart overcoat, with an imposing fur collar. Thus not a small-town man.

And as the show was over and the four of us, with the rest of the crowd, stepped outside, a woman, observing the fur collar, said quite audibly, and with a laugh :

" Look ! There's one of Hoboken's aristocracy."

Which was a " slam " by superior New York against what was supposed to be the sartorial presumption of a witless denizen of darkest New Jersey. . . . America is full of these regional rivalries.

We laughed at this sally, very heartily. We were in the best of humours. Nothing could have disturbed that, even

BACK TO METROPOLIS

if we had all been wearing fur collars. For we were on the track of good German beer, and had been assured that we should certainly find it.

On the theatre programme, indeed, very thinly disguised, three hotels and restaurants were advertising such attractions. And we had been directed well in advance to what we were told was the best.

It was a very good best. An old-fashioned hotel, with quite a long history, and attached to it a large bar-café, with tables and a very pleasant air. The handsome but not over-ornate bar, with brass rail complete, was garnished with bottles. The lager—golden or dark brown—was running freely. There might never have been any whisper of Prohibition.

We had after-theatre sandwiches, with large mugs of beer. The sandwiches were not repeated, but the beer was. It was really first-rate—as good German beer as I have ever tasted, and there was the added delight of being able to drink it openly, as though restriction had never been heard of.

Once such nights as these start there is no knowing where they will end. At four o'clock in the morning the landlord was still drawing beer, and though the bar door was locked all lights were brightly on. Thus we were doing in New Jersey what nobody would ever dare do in London. The landlord explained that he had bought the hotel as a bet. He was doing very well. He had no trouble about any kind of liquor, quite apart from the beer. Wine and spirits of every kind were brought to him in small parcels at a time from sailors in the port. They loaded their special body belts with half a dozen bottles—wine, brandy, or whisky—and just walked up to him. Any evening we phoned from New York and said just what we wanted to drink with dinner, it would be there on the table for us, openly, in the restaurant. A bottle of the very best Rhine wine for thirty shillings, which, considering everything, was not dear.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

One of the friends we made was a buyer of precious books—a sort of Dr. Rosenbach—in quite a large way. He lived at this hotel because he liked the “open” atmosphere.

We told stories, of all sorts of places. . . . At something after four in the morning there came a sudden rat-tat-tat on the window of the door opening on to the street.

“I thought it was too good to last,” was my instant thought. What was this—police, hold-up, or both?

The landlord calmly went to the window and drew aside the flimsy blind. It was raining heavily.

A voice called out something from the street.

“No, bring it up in the morning,” the landlord called back. “I can’t bother now. To-morrow will do.”

And as he rejoined us he told us that the man outside was a sailor with half a dozen bottles of brandy under his coat.

Half an hour later, when we left, we found the landlord outside sitting in his car, waiting for us. He drove us the mile down to the waterside and the subway station, and hoped he would see us all again, when we might be sure that the best in the house would be available for us at any time or for any meal. A very pleasant attention, and a very charming send-off. He had stayed up for hours after closing-time, with the waiter long since gone to bed, just to serve us with his excellent beer.

So back on the subway to New York, with the first batch of the new day’s workers in that city which never really seems to go to sleep.

GOOD-BYE TO AMERICA

IT IS MY LAST DAY in New York, and naturally I have left a hundred things undone. So in my pyjamas I am sitting on the bedside working the telephone like a machine-gun, and feeling very grateful for an efficient telephone service.

"Hallo, is that you? . . . Yes, I'm sailing to-night. . . . Sorry I haven't seen more of you, but the fact is . . ."

The usual excuses.

The chambermaid comes in, and stands amazed to see me active so early, with my hearty English breakfast of coffee and grape fruit already done with and laid aside.

"Are you really going to-day, sir? . . . I'm sorry you're going."

So am I, in a way. One becomes attached to a hotel bedroom after you have been in it a month, even if it is a rather small one and contains enough back-number newspapers to load a barge. For a whole month they have been accumulating, and I am about three weeks late in my exploration of them. They'll have to stay. Even the *Majestic* would object if I took all those aboard.

And yet it is very good to know that I am sailing, that Southampton will be the next stop.

She is a very good sort, the chambermaid, pleasant in manner and face. She comes from somewhere in the Middle West, and is of German extraction, but doesn't suggest it in any way. And oddly enough she has practically no American accent. Just a quick pleasant speech.

"It's always the way," she says. "Just when you're getting to know somebody—they go. And to-morrow, when I come into this room, there'll be somebody else here. It won't be the same."

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

It is true, and it occurs to me that perhaps there are woes in the lives of chambermaids which we don't realise, and that perhaps they sometimes become quite amiably attached to guests who go carelessly away without thinking on these things. But then she is a particularly pleasant sort of woman.

For a month the view out of my windows has seemed as permanent as Time: a narrow perspective of tall, slender apartment buildings, with somebody's expensive "pent house" flat on top of one of them, and far away down below a peep, about twenty yards long, of one of the Avenues. . . . And now I must really pack up.

My chambermaid lingers to talk, and tells me that she is thinking of leaving hotel work. An opera singer who has been staying in the opposite room has offered to employ her as maid and take her back to Europe. The *diva* started on one of her many tours across the continent only that morning. I inquire her name, and find it is somebody I knew slightly in Paris nearly twenty years before. For three weeks she has been staying within ten feet of me.

In my mind's eye I follow her on her continental journey: Chicago, St. Louis, and the rest. Would I like to be starting out at once on that same broad trail through the cities? No! Once an appointed journey has come to an end one is glad for it to be ended. I have seen these cities, and that is enough. Europe is inclined to regard with envy those internationally famous artists who make one golden tour of America after another. But I imagine that the artists, if they were indiscreet enough, would have a different story to tell. . . . Chicago to St. Louis; St. Louis to Omaha. . . . *Merci!* Some other day, perhaps.

How I bustle round on that last day. If one always worked and dashed about like this even the English income tax—that savage and ruthless monster that tears us into

GOOD-BYE TO AMERICA

financial bits—would cease to have any terrors. But it can't be done every day—not even by Americans.

I ought to crowd in a visit to a dentist. There have been steady warnings during the past few days. And I am starting on a sea voyage. "Never start on a voyage with a bad tooth," said a friend the day before. Wise words, but unheeded. Perhaps it is that I am a little excited. It should be good fun going back in this monster liner, with nothing to do but eat and be lazy, and lounge round the swimming pool, and talk to pleasant people. The great steamer will be full, with not a cabin unoccupied, and no doubt we shall be a collection of the world's really important people. Perhaps a film star or two. Not that this would thrill me as much as most people. I have been to Hollywood. I have been blooded, so to speak. I know. In future, if a film star visits London, I shall not join the agitated multitudes that wait for her coming. . . . But anyhow for six days I shall be living, like any prince, among the world's elect.

The taxi at last, and all the luggage, and an English friend and his wife to see me off. It is to be a midnight sailing, which should be very romantic. On the way I call at a drug-store, just as a wise precaution against the tooth. Then the dockside, and the great liner.

Great Heavens ! The vast vessel is black with humanity, and clamorous with the noise of very noisy people. It is like Hampstead Heath on Bank Holiday. Crowds swarm on every deck. And this is not the world's élite. By no means. Not Mayfair and Newport. Not even Big Business and Hollywood. It is the clothes, pants, and fur trade of New York, off to Europe to buy pretty things for the coming season. All the Israelites of Metropolis are there. My friend, who was born with a monocle which he has worn ever since, not being aware that it is in his eye even when he walks down Seventh Avenue, stares astounded.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

I had heard much about the "fun" of midnight sailings. But this ! The swarming decks and alleyways were littered with empty cigarette packets. Stewards stood about trying not to look helpless and hopeless.

"Had you any idea it was anything like this ?" I said to my friend.

"By Jove, no ! I've never seen such a sight. . . . How's your tooth ?"

"I've forgotten it. There's too much to see."

Till midnight, and long after, the riot went on ; cabins and alleyways gorged with people ; men and women calling to each other ; shouts and roars of laughter about nothing in particular. Then the Exodus began, and for half an hour and more the friends—about ten to each passenger—poured down the gangways in a steady stream. But not to go away. They remained on the dockside, six deep, to shout.

"Why on earth do you admit such a mob as this on the ship ?" I inquired of one of the ship's officers.

"We can't help ourselves. All the other lines do it. If we didn't they wouldn't sail by us."

"But you wouldn't allow such a riot on the English side."

"By Jove, we wouldn't ! . . . But you couldn't collect such a crowd over there."

As the ship imperceptibly leaves the dockside the clamour of farewells swells into a repulsive roar. Men and women, on the dockside and on the ship, go mad. Their frenzy is so great that it is almost as though they are cursing each other ; calling down maledictions instead of blessings. Immediately near me on the rail is a Jew of about thirty-five, not at all bad-looking in his way, whose conduct is extraordinary. He howls like a wolf at the friends he is leaving behind, shakes his fist, leaps, screeches—his voice cracks. You would say he wanted to rend them, not hug them. . . . Two

GOOD-BYE TO AMERICA

nights later I see him helping to preside at the auction on the ship's run, in the smoke-room, with dinner-jacket and large cigar, very much the correct man of the world.

We drop slowly down the river, and peace comes. There is the Woolworth Building, with a shred of torn sky scudding past the remote top of it; then the other great buildings of the Skyline, with windows lighted here and there, so that none of their impressiveness is lost and mystery is added to them. They do not seem then mere immense boxes of stone and steel, full of typewriters and patent office furniture. They are the romantic pinnacles of a mighty city such as the world has never seen before. . . . Which is true in more ways than one.

The ferry-boats, each a blaze of light, flit about, seemingly quite careless of our massive presence. On a ferry-boat you are conscious that it is a very big vessel. Now they look like very active and highly illuminated water beetles.

"Toot, toot!" One of them slips impudently across the bows of our sixty thousand tons and heads for Staten Island.

That is New York fading away. It is hard to believe it. One thinks of a lot of things. . . . "What do you think of America?"

That tooth!

It had only been waiting until I was really started, and the next day it really declared itself. I took it with me down to the doctor and after examination he shook his head.

"There are two of 'em wrong, I think. . . . Try this."

"This" proved to be no good. The next day my face had quite lost its usual contours. The doctor looked again and said that if any job had to be done it would have to be with chloroform. A nasty business. Best keep it at bay, until I could see a dentist. He didn't want the job very

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

much. I didn't want it very much. . . . And the nearest dentist over two thousand miles away.

I saw that voyage through a mist of misery. Even if the élite had been on board I couldn't have enjoyed them. All the people I met, all the things they said, the music, the dancing, the bridge, the swimming pool I couldn't go into, that day of heavy storm when the wave tops were whipped off into what looked like driven snow—all this, as I look back on it, seems merely a dream. And not a pleasant dream.

Thus the broad Atlantic, the life of as great an argosy as floats on any ocean, the arrival in London, were all dominated and made dreadful by one baleful, aching tooth. (Or two.)

My dentist at last. Not a call, but an irruption. And you know how busy dentists are.

"Can you manage this for me to-night? Or to-morrow at the latest?"

"My dear sir, I wouldn't take the responsibility of letting this go another hour. . . . Heaven help any ship's doctor who took that on."

He lifts the telephone to speak to his anæsthetist.

Never start on a voyage with a tooth that is out of humour.

On this first dash through London I yet had the presence of mind to notice it with American eyes. And my first impressions as a stranger were how small the buildings looked and how big the policemen. It has to be proclaimed that though London can show nothing like the Equitable Building, it does produce massive policemen who make the average New York "cop" look quite a lightweight.

Another very revealing flash was when the taxi went through one of London's typical squares. Pale sunlight was on the Georgian houses, it all looked wonderfully gracious and dignified, not to say gentlemanly, and so for the first time I saw London as do Americans who come to

GOOD-BYE TO AMERICA

England looking for something they have always read about and—as I see now—unfailing find.

For quite a long time I went about with this sort of dual personality—a Londoner with the eyes of a New Yorker. It gave me both thrills and disappointments. All sorts of pleasant backwaters which before I had taken quite for granted took on a new dignity—quite often one might call it beauty. Soho looked better than I had ever imagined it could. It is a real “quarter” after all. Hyde Park looked amazingly rural. (Central Park cannot begin to compare with it.) The red coats of Guardsmen, the fleets of scarlet omnibuses, the gleam and glow of coffee stalls at night—I saw all these things as they should be seen, as things of beauty. But on the whole I should have preferred to see the building line raised a story or two. Without desiring forty stories, I felt that occasionally ten would be an advantage. And the sight of a blatant new cinema, much admired, was displeasing. St. Louis can do that sort of thing much better.

On my first walk abroad at night, comforted by the suavity, the homeliness, the mellowness, the feeling of utter security that London gives—and aware also how dim and sparse are its lights of gaiety compared with those of Broadway—I approached a policeman, seeking certain information.

I did it with no more sense of adventure than I would speak to a bus conductor. One is not afraid of London policemen, despite certain little incidents of recent years, and despite the fact that they are perhaps a trifle more brusque to the citizen than they used to be. A London policeman does not swing a nightstick, as does a New York cop, nor carry a pistol. . . . I approached this one, indeed, with a certain amount of patriotic pride to think that London policemen are what they are—despite the fact, again, that on the whole our own newspaper praise of them has been just a trifle too fulsome. . . . Still, on the whole, the Lon-

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

don policeman is probably the best in the world, and such were my comforting feelings.

This one was standing outside the Pavilion Theatre. The time was midnight, and I needed cigarettes. In New York this would cause no difficulty. In London, home of freedom, it does. But I remembered that somewhere in the neighbourhood there had been a tobacconist's which made a practice of opening *after* midnight, when the law says another day begins and cigarettes may be sold.

The policeman was standing foursquare on the pavement. He had a moustache of the walrus type. He had indeed a slightly forbidding air. And on the whole, he was perhaps not the most intelligent-looking policeman in London.

I asked my question about the tobacconist.

He shook his head. Even a shake of the head can be eloquent. This was a surly shake. It said, "Go away, and don't bother me."

"But I'm sure I remember such a shop."

"Know nothing about it."

"Then," said I, with sudden irritation, "you damned well ought to!"

And suddenly realised that, perhaps, I had used insulting language to the police, and might be run in on the spot. It has happened for no more.

But fortunately my policeman seemed to be too astonished to move. Perhaps it was my vehemence that did it. He could not know that in that feeling was expressed all the deception of a wanderer who, returning to find something that only the homeland can give, to his consternation finds it wanting.

A New York "cop," armed to the teeth, and proud of the knowledge that he is the boss of the citizens, and that the citizens are not the boss of him, could not have been more brusque to a civil inquiry.

All these things and many more I noticed, until gradually

GOOD-BYE TO AMERICA

I became a Londoner again, and slowly the buildings rose a foot or two, like those islands that appear out of the sea. But for a long time to come I shall know what many things in London and England really look like to American eyes, which is very useful knowledge. . . . And it is amusing to look on Piccadilly Circus, in those first astonishing moments after the return from New York, and feel that it is the market-place of Lilliput.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

INEVITABLY, AFTER ONE'S RETURN, many people ask the question, "And what do you really think of America?" (meaning the United States).

It is so very difficult to answer. One can be sweeping or sarcastic, friendly or unfriendly, and not convey any real impression or any of the real truth of what one has seen. From nobody who knew America before I saw it myself did I ever derive any real impression of what the country (and the people in it) was like. Perhaps it is impossible to convey anything coherent from one's medley of impressions. Perhaps it is because one hardly knows what to think oneself.

But the real truth, I suspect, of this almost universal vagueness is because, to almost any Englishman of any sensibilities, the United States must as a whole, considered as a place of residence, be antipathetic, despite the many things and people he finds there that he likes. And we don't want to say so, partly because we feel we would rather not say so of a people who in a sense have been our hosts, and partly because we feel it better, for many reasons, not to.

Think of any reasonable Englishman to whom you may have addressed the inevitable question about America. The sudden, worried puckering of the face, the "Well, I wouldn't live there for anything." And then the sudden lightening of expression as he adds, "But, by Jove, you can't deny that they're damned hospitable." . . . He is thinking of the nice people he has met, who have been kind or pleasant to him, and pushing the rest of his opinions into the background.

So it is that the United States remain, to Britain, an undiscovered country. Only those individuals who have visited them have any real idea what they are about—and

SOME CONCLUSIONS

that probably a very confused one. But exactly what sort of an inhabited country the United States collectively make is no more known in England than what sort of a country Bulgaria is. Indeed, not so much. Bulgaria is so simple. America is so complex.

America is never discovered, but is always concealed. It is a sedulous concealment which has been going on ever since the first Sadie from Chicago broke into the English aristocracy, which no doubt was a very good thing for the aristocracy. And the main motive behind this concealment has been a good one—the desire not to give offence.

English writers on America have almost entirely lent themselves to this policy of concealment. Some undoubtedly have given a definite American “slant” to their writings—sometimes even a slightly anti-English “slant”—in the desire to please the country where so many English writers feel that fortune is, or ought to be, awaiting. Others have gone very warily, have indeed sat on the fence in masterly fashion, with the firm intention of saying nothing which could disturb their profitable literary connections in the United States. But the great bulk of them, I am sure, have felt their style on the subject of America to be very much cramped because of their keen desire not to give offence, to hurt, by giving their frank impressions. Every English writer who returns from America must carry in mind the memory of many people he would like to meet again, and as he thinks of them, and thinks also of the desirability of cordial relations between the two countries, his pen remains suspended. Or he crosses something out. . . . It would be easy to give instances of writers who have been restrained by this worthy motive.

To all of which millions of Americans, of many races, would say: “What in the name of all that is vehement does it matter to us what you think of us?” To which one could only reply: “Agreed. One must expect such a reply. Only,

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

if one is to try to give a real impression of that very complex organism known as the United States, which we are told now dominates the world in so many ways, it is time that, however inadequately, it should be done with a certain amount of friendly candour."

But one thing can be said with every enthusiasm, and that is, that no inhabitant of Great Britain who wishes to understand the modern world should fail to visit the United States if he can possibly do so. A man may know Europe very well, but he simply does not understand the world of to-day unless he has some real acquaintance with the United States. It will teach him many things, even if only the major lesson that, with every allowance made for the accumulating wealth and commercial prosperity of the United States and the really marvellous things accomplished in that vast country, the main advantages of existence still remain on the European side of the Atlantic. There is so much else in life than mere wealth.

The real culprit in all this misunderstanding of America is the Great War. Before then all the European civilisations, Britain, France, Germany, and the rest, were aware of the United States, but not obsessed by them. Many of the artisans and peasants of these countries may have dreamed of America as the great land of opportunity. They may have believed all the rather too urgent protestations about liberty, a relic of the far-off days when certain colonists who were not oppressed broke away from a Mother Country which was not an oppressor, or at any rate not so much as an impartial historian would notice. But the great mass of Europeans who did not wield the hammer or hold the plough accepted America much as America thought of herself: a very great country, superficially speaking, but a country still in the making; a place where inevitably, despite its rapidly growing wealth, there were many crudi-

SOME CONCLUSIONS

ties ; a country which had made remarkable progress considering the short time it had been in the business of nationhood ; a country where millionaires of large calibre, beyond European size, were already familiar figures, so that we called them Oil Kings and Steel Kings ; but a country which, despite its immense natural advantages, was filled with a strange diversity of ill-assimilated races ; which had still a very long way to go before it could be regarded as a nation as the European Powers thought of the term. . . . A country where the skyscraper was still in its comparative infancy, although it had even then achieved a remarkable world-publicity for the place of its origin. A country, it is true, that was already very much talked about, but regarded as still being very far behind the leading countries of Europe in most of the things that mattered. Not even a real naval or military power, in days when to be a great naval or military power was one of the hall-marks of civilisation.

But the war changed all that, and while all Europe was locked breathlessly in the four years' struggle, America stole on us like a creditor in the night. The war changed us, and seemed to change her. But the fact is that, riches apart, America was just the same country after the war that she was before it ; essentially she still remained that same partially developed community where in many respects frontier conditions still ruled, side by side with great material prosperity. That is what Europe has not-realised.

The Europeans, victors and vanquished, emerged from the war to find America sitting in the seat of the mighty. Vast prestige, overwhelming money power, a terrific idealism. The United States sent a President over to us who was treated as a god. His lightest word made the tired nations of Europe hang their heads. He over-rode sovereign rights and, as he might have said himself, got away with it.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

America had participated in the war, although only on limited terms—associated, but not allied—and though her entry into the war may have been regarded as well timed, late or nearly too late, according to fancy, she contrived to give her own participation the air of a splendid and romantic crusade, something that was quite different in every way from the services performed by the soldiers of other nations. It is true that in going to the war she also, in some sense, went to the rescue. But that was exactly what Britain did on August 4th, 1914, when Belgium was already crumpling up and the haggard citizens of Paris, with the war only three days old, were wondering what *Perfide Albion* was going to do. It is true that America crossed the wide seas to do it—but then so had the Australians, the Canadians, the South Africans, and the New Zealanders, years before. In short, there is nothing that America did in the war that was not matched twenty times over by other nations which are now regarded in the United States with a certain tolerance. . . . Nations that are always asking for money!

It may be said of President Wilson that he came, spoke, and conquered. Before this the Presidential typewriter, hammering out its Fourteen Points, had outlined for valiant and almost exhausted nations exactly what they were to do when at last they had achieved victory by their prodigal outpouring of blood and treasure. Then he disembarked in Europe, and kings, and other presidents, bowed before him. He represented the country which had done by far the least in the war, and grown even more wealthy in doing it, but his pronouncements were regarded as almost semi-divine. Europe almost grovelled, and Heaven only knows why.

It is from this period that dates what we may call the inferiority complex of England and Europe *vis-à-vis* America. Its psychology varied with the nations, and is perhaps too complicated to explore here. With most of them we may say that its chief motive was due to the fact that Uncle Sam

SOME CONCLUSIONS

had become Uncle Mammon. France, Italy, and the rest wanted to get out of their war debts, at any cost to their creditors. This was not the case with Britain. Indeed, she rushed with an indecent haste to pay out vast quantities of money, a very large proportion of which she did not really owe. But other factors operated with us. The United States meant to us, or so we persuaded ourselves, something that they could never mean to any Continental nation. There was the old sentiment. This great, young country was, in some sense, a child of our own. There was the community of race (up to a point) and of language. And then it has for very long been our habit to be very careful, even indulgent, with America. She is touchy. We are not. She has often enough amused herself by twisting the Lion's tail, but it has never been our habit to stir up the Eagle. There is all the difference in temperament of a self-confident youth and a middle-aged man.

And then, perhaps the greatest factor of all, there was American idealism. It invaded us like a fever, as all-pervading as jazz-music or "the pictures." English political writers grew pale with emotion when they thought of American idealism. Our statesmen uncovered to it, as though it was the *Marseillaise* or *The Star Spangled Banner*, or even *God Save the King*. A voice from Washington, no matter to whom it belonged, or on what subject it spoke, had a suggestion of celestial origin about it. . . . And meanwhile Washington was developing one of the most efficient house-to-house bootlegging services in the United States, and many of its distinguished senators were happily engaged in the profitable preliminaries to the Teapot Dome oil scandal, and various other manifestations of that graft which is almost second nature to political America.

This is what quite a large proportion of America itself succinctly calls "bunk." According to Americans them-

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

selves, there is a vast deal of hypocrisy in that country, in politics, in religion, in morals, and in many other ways. Prohibition itself, for instance, is one immense, organised hypocrisy. But there is also a vast deal of plain speaking, and writing, about this hypocrisy. It is one of the many contrasts of which America is so full. There is nobody more courageously outspoken than the critical American.

To this type of United States citizen who writhes under the hypocrisies of his own country—even though he thinks England has plenty of her own—the various manifestations of England's inferiority complex are anything but welcome. Our constant desire to please, at all costs, produces no good results. It irritates the decent American. It produces a sort of contempt among the many millions of inferior "Americans." In this regard the United States are somewhat Oriental. They only understand people who believe in themselves, and are not afraid to say so.

This rush to please at all costs was evident in the important concessions we granted to America under the Liquor Treaty. We treated this matter as though we were discussing high-minded idealisms at Locarno, or brotherhood between nations at Geneva. The facts are that Prohibition has produced in the United States wholesale corruption and an immense increase of violent crime. This was well known. America talks and writes about it every day. But the British Government, true to its American inferiority complex, behaved as though Prohibition was really the "noble experiment" that President Hoover described it when he was contesting the presidential election.

"The English were damn fools to allow us to chase your ships up to the twelve-mile limit," said an American to me. "Why should you go out of your way to make it easy for our Prohibitionists when millions of us in this country want the drink in, and when any Prohibition agent can be bribed to let it in?"

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Early in 1929 a commission from the United States tried to persuade the Canadian Government to forbid the export of liquor into the United States. After much discussion, Canada refused to go to any such lengths to aid the American fanatics. Canada's refusal was applauded throughout the press of America.

As all the United States knows, the corruption and crime on those parts of the border where the main streams of Canadian liquor flow over reach almost unimaginable heights. The official advices sent from Canada to the U.S. Customs officials, as to what cargoes of liquor were being dispatched, proved an embarrassment to the super-crooks, official and otherwise, who merely wanted the liquor, without any unnecessary official documents.

And Canada's refusal to lend herself to any such demand—that she should enforce America's own unenforceable laws—was hailed with joy in America, in cartoon and “editorial.” The best that is in America understands that sort of thing much more than England's complacent lying down to any suggestion that comes from Washington. We should have said precisely what Canada said, when we were asked to help the United States to enforce what millions of United States citizens do not intend to accept. America would have been much more favourably impressed—and this applies even to Washington—if we had said: “No, it's your own law, and you can do what you like with it. But don't expect us to help you by extending the old three-mile limit to twelve. In our country drink is still lawful, and indeed only the revenue we derive from its sale enables us to pay you those heavy annual tributes left over from the war. So you will understand that we can take no step which would seem to cast a moral aspersion on a commodity which to us—and you—is so valuable.”

Such an attitude, just for once, would do more good for Anglo-American relations than a thousand Pilgrims' Ban-

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

quets, valuable though those no doubt are. But all that our subservience in enlarging the three-mile limit does is to produce such incidents as those of the sunk schooner *Pm Alone*. The attitude of the great bulk of the United States press to that high-handed action in favour of the wholesale immoralities of Prohibition is a vindication of all that has been said here. And as for the British Ambassador's surrender of his embassy's rights to the anti-liquor fanatics, one may say that such meaningless weakness did more harm to England than a thousand defeats at golf or lawn tennis.

Perhaps the most startling discovery one can make in the United States is the fact that a very considerable proportion of its people have come to the conclusion that they really won the war.

When this rumour first began to go round, some two or three years after the war was over, no sensible person in Europe paid any real attention to it. No doubt that attitude was then a right one. But things have changed very much since. There are innumerable individuals in the United States who are much too fair and sane to indulge even now in any such fantastic idea. But the people as a whole, aided by the super-patriots, a section of the press, the politicians, the films, and that curious belief that everything that is American is necessarily the most worthy and most virtuous, have now hypnotised themselves into the conviction that America did all that really mattered. The ease with which the years 1914-17 are forgotten, and all memory concentrated on 1918, is amazing.

This illusion of a very great part of a vast nation is not merely a matter for ridicule. It has its direct effect on international politics. The more firmly America believes this, the more likely she is to feel confirmed in her official attitude to Europe as a continent of warring barbarians, full of old-fashioned treaties and secret diplomacy, and the more likely

SOME CONCLUSIONS

we are to see further manifestations of that growing American Imperialism which is not entirely a myth.

It is a subject which is difficult to discuss even with some of the best and most open-minded Americans. Although they know that such a claim is absurd, on the whole they would like to feel that American participation was the really deciding factor. How much truth there is even in that view I do not propose to attempt to discuss here. It is a matter for the military historians, although I have my own opinion on it.

But even if that were true, it is not what matters in this case. If the war was really a fight to maintain what we call civilisation, as against the scientific military barbarism of the Germany of 1914, then in the upholding of civilisation the Allies by the middle of 1917 were almost bled to death. The war by that time had become merely a blood tax on those nations which believed in the upholding of this civilisation. America believed in this ideal, as she assured us both before and after her participation. The blood tax she was called upon to pay in saving it was very, very small, and that is the only point of view that need be presented in any discussion of whether or not America won the war.

But it would be vain to put such a view forward to the bulk of the inhabitants of the United States. They have become confirmed in their comforting illusion, and they believe that the soldiers who crossed the Atlantic to Europe were crusaders of a nobility such as the world had never seen before. And this despite the fact that in America you will constantly hear and read references to the amazingly low-grade mentality of the bulk of the men who came in under the drafts. . . . Another example of realistic thinking as opposed to a widespread self-complacency.

It is the habit, of course, of every nation to exalt the courage and splendour of its own soldiers in war. That is an emotion of which the world will probably never rid

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

itself, however sedulously the movement towards universal peace may be cultivated. We think of a particular battalion as one indivisible unit of rock-like heroism and self-sacrifice, forgetful that it is really composed of a thousand individuals of very varying characteristics and values. The dead soldier is a hero, whatever he was in life and however he died. All monuments, all over the world, say so.

But though this is a tendency, and a very natural one, common to all nations, the United States—so far as the last war is concerned—easily excels any other in giving expression to it. If ever there was a sort of inferiority complex about America's tardy participation in the war, it has long since been forgotten, and has been replaced by a mass-production complacency and pride concerning the events of 1914-18. As ex-President Coolidge said in his Armistice Day speech: "When the great conflict finally broke upon us!" It is a complacency which has a very definite business as well as patriotic value. So long as America feels like this there can be no uneasiness of mind concerning those war debts. "Those Europeans" may be feeling the pinch a bit, but they're always getting into wars, anyhow, and don't know how to finish them off when they begin. America had to do that for them, spending a lot of her own best blood and her own good money in the process—and too much talk about generosity to France and the rest of them becomes tiresome after that.

Britain's insistence on paying is, of course, fairly widely recognised. But the general attitude to this is—why not? The facts—the crippling facts, for England—and the moral aspect of the question are almost entirely unrecognised. You will read American newspapers a very long time before you will find in them anything approaching the following generous editorial note which appeared in the *New York World* some time late in 1928:

SOME CONCLUSIONS

"BRITAIN SQUARES ACCOUNTS FOR 1918

"To-day the British Government completes the sixth of its annual payments on its American war debt, and now has only fifty-six more such payments to make. Since the funding of the debt agreement it has turned over to the United States Treasury the sum of \$964,000,000, and as \$100,000,000 was paid in cash before the signing of the agreement, the grand total of payments exceeds a billion. This amounts, roughly, to a fourth of the original debt. Only about 15 per cent. of these payments, however, have been applied to the principal of the debt, the rest representing interest. In consequence the principal has been reduced so far by only 3.2 per cent. The extinction of the debt is thus seen to be a slow process.

"It is difficult to visualise the real burden which these annuities impose on the British people. Total payments for the current year amount to \$134,000,000. This sum would endow two great universities like Harvard and Yale. It would pay all the running expenses of the first seven American States listed alphabetically. When the sacrifices are measured by these standards the absurdity of expecting such an arrangement to remain unchanged for the next half century is readily manifest. And after 1932 the present agreement calls for even heavier payments."

It is nice to read this sort of thing, even though it is a very rare example, and even though it will have no effect on a vast population which is convinced that in the matter of the war debts righteousness is with it. . . . Or perhaps some day the mighty germ of right and truth that lies in Britain's quiet attitude to the question of our payments to America will burgeon, as a result of the slow process of time, and burst through the complete misunderstanding that now imprisons it, and show even self-complacent America that never was a nation more wrongheaded in its attitude to a great issue which is much more moral than financial. Or is

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

this too much to hope for, ever? Such a view is certainly discouraged when we think on the stark fact that to this day certain of the Southern states still refuse to pay their debts to Britain, in the form of repudiated bonds, contracted as far back as the days before the Civil War. The fact that two such points of view on the question of money can daily lie down side by side in a country swollen with prosperity shows that there is nothing that may not be expected from American public opinion.

The part that Hollywood has played, consciously or otherwise, in this wholesale manufacture of pride concerning the war has been a very powerful one. In *The Big Parade*, *What Price Glory*, *Wings*, and hundreds of other picture dramas of the war less well known, the power of American arms and the glory of American youth have been presented to a world which has accepted this phenomenon with an amazing complacency.

It is in its way one of the outstanding ironies of the war that practically all the dramas concerning it in that medium which appeals not merely to the million, but to the hundred million, should have been made in that sunny clime which hardly any living echo of the war ever reached. There is one scene which is almost inevitable in every American film drama of the war. The heroes of the story, leaving the trenches temporarily behind them, go to Paris and are seen in a war-time cabaret, where in some rôle or other the heroine also contrives to be. I have looked at this scene, with slight variations, some dozens of times, but although French officers always figure in it (after all, it is Paris where the incident is happening, and every such picture must have a little "*Vive la France* stuff"), never have I noticed the slightest indication that British officers also occasionally took this sort of French leave during the war.

With regard to the films, indeed, we need have no reti-

SOME CONCLUSIONS

cences whatever. As far as they are concerned, America not only won the war, but won it a hundred times over. When America is fighting the war of 1917-18 on the films there is at the most a faint suggestion here and there of some sort of shadowy European participation in the background. But for ninety-nine per cent. of the time the battlegrounds of the Allies are merely areas for American heroes and heroines to play in.

We must not be too severe about this. If Hollywood was to make dramas of the war, which as time went on became a very good card to play, she could not perhaps be expected to give America's comrades-in-arms their due share of representation. That would have been to overshadow completely the "American end" of such films, and Hollywood could not overlook the effect of such a state of things on the box-office returns of the myriad cinemas in the United States. It is true that in any other country the affair might have been arranged with a little more sense of proportion. Great and enthusiastic audiences in Britain, for instance, sat and looked at *Wings*, which was a glorification of young America in the war as fought in the air. For every one such Knight of the Air sent over by America, Britain must have sent about a hundred, perhaps a thousand. There is, of course, no hint of any such state of things in *Wings*, which is a story of American dash and bravery made for American consumption—which, with the power that Hollywood wields in this respect, means world consumption.

All we can do is to realise what an immense power this has been—by means of propaganda and suggestion—in teaching America to believe mightily in itself, whether in peace or in war. The real answer to it ought to be that, if Hollywood does this sort of thing about its own war, Europe will do the same about hers. But that apparently is to preach an impossibility. Hollywood stands alone in this respect. And that brings one to some further considerations

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

of this extraordinary source of film power, not merely as it affects a nation's comprehension of its own military history, but as it affects the world in general on things in general.

The only way to learn the truth about Hollywood is to visit it—and then leave it. You cannot understand it while you are there. There is so much that is pleasant, balmy, clean, well organised, well built, and generally praiseworthy—after such a short civic existence—in Los Angeles and its rather more famous suburb, that to be critical at all seems to be merely captious. There is the usual run of murders, of course, and as far as police and civic corruption go, Los Angeles apparently has comparatively little to learn from cities which have been much longer at the business. But one learns to take that sort of thing more or less for granted.

Yet with so much that is admirable, there is something about Hollywood that is very much wanting. Every European resident there is restless, regards it as an exile, wants to get away. Even the New Yorkers feel it. They feel it even in what in New York would be winter-time, so that if they left then, as they gladly would, they would exchange soft sunshine for a rigorous climate. There is big money to be made, of course, for some people. . . . If it weren't for that !

One only realises what Hollywood is like after one has left it, and it is New York more than any other place which brings the balance of values true again. New York regards Hollywood as a joke. It laughs at it. The fact that both are American means nothing, as is always the case when one section of the United States is criticising another. New York simply won't take Hollywood seriously. You meet writing men and others who have been there for a time—and then fled. Something they just couldn't stand. They wouldn't live there for fifty thousand dollars a year.

There is very little pretence about this attitude of the New Yorker. The "film fan," of course, exists by the

SOME CONCLUSIONS

hundred thousand in New York, as everywhere else. But anything approaching the intellectual in New York will have none of any sort of pretension from Hollywood. The comic press laughs at it. The daily press uses it principally as an object of satire. There are as many jokes about the mentality of Hollywood as there were about the old Ford car. The metropolis cannot forget that "big business" in the films had its origin in the humblest reaches of the New York Jewish clothes trade. Its satiric attitude is on the whole perhaps rather overdone. But at any rate New York will stand no sort of nonsense from Hollywood, and talks down to it, and one cannot deny that in an age when the world is in danger of going film mad it is a healthy attitude.

So that, without necessarily adopting New York's almost ferocious point of view, one does derive a certain corrective from this astringency in weighing up Hollywood—when one has left it behind. One sees it in its true proportions: as a city of immense make-believe which has succeeded in imposing itself on almost all of the rest of the world as the real thing. It is really astonishing how this aggregation of a dozen or two large film studios has succeeded in dominating the thoughts of countless millions of people—not merely young ones—throughout the globe. There is nothing more real in the films than there is in a third-rate music hall in a third-rate city anywhere. A film actress whose face makes girls everywhere adore her, and young men everywhere dream of her as the ideal mate—or the ideal odalisque—may not even be pretty when you meet her, may not even be in the slightest degree interesting, and may have nothing whatever to mark her out from the average female person, except her clothes, her motor-cars, and the pleasant house she lives in. . . . On the other hand, of course, a film star may be beautiful when you meet her. She may be a very pleasant and natural person, with no particular nonsense about her in any way. But one may lay it down as an axiom

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

that no heroine of the films can ever in reality be anything like so fascinating or so interesting as the films, and film publicity, make her.

This glamour, of course, is nothing new. It has existed ever since there was a stage. But whereas until recent years the glamour of a public entertainer was, roughly, limited to those who could see and hear her, to-day that glamour affects millions who will never be within a few thousand miles of their idol. It is a mass-production glamour, that overleaps all barriers of space and race.

That is precisely what Hollywood is—a factory on an immense scale for the production of glamour for world consumption. Its heroes and heroines, however gifted, weave all their spells within large sheds, almost as big and bare as aeroplane hangars, and in their tenderest love passages or in their most heroic moments are surrounded by a medley of ordinary human clay, who may be directors with megaphones or carpenters with hammers. Some of these directors may swear like bargees, the carpenter may be chewing gum, and not caring a hoot who the lady on the lot is. . . . But the vast public of the whole world cares nothing for all this, even if it knows it, and on the whole would prefer not to know it.

Glamour in tin boxes ! This is what Hollywood produces and exports, with a genius for manufacture, salesmanship, and publicity—and now and again for something more admirable—which cannot be denied. Value for weight, its product, radium apart, is the most precious substance the world has ever known. A few coils of celluloid imprinted with a face dear to myriads of people of all languages and races, and now magically imprinted with voices too, may bring in millions of money. . . . If there is no other romance in Hollywood, there is romance in that. It is the romance of commerce.

On these small boxes of celluloid great enterprises are

SOME CONCLUSIONS

reared, vast fortunes are made, and personalities greater—through the magic lantern—than Cæsar's bestride the earth more widely than did that colossus. Mr. Douglas Fairbanks, from his home in Beverly Hills, talks to a London newspaper on the telephone concerning a new film organisation, of strictly local and business interest, and England is rather more thrilled than if President Hoover had telephoned to say that, after thinking matters over, he had come to the conclusion that America really hadn't any need for any kind of navy.

That is what Hollywood has done to the nations. The voice of Doug, whether on the talkies or the telephone, is the voice of a sort of deity.

Day by day Doug drives from his pleasant villa to his studio, and back again. Perhaps at night he may appear in the Coconut Grove of the Ambassador Hotel, where hour by hour the saxophones moan and the diners produce immense hip flasks. . . . And the slightest utterance from him, or his wife, or any of their more famous professional or business friends, sets the cables flashing round the earth.

It is all very wonderful—and wonderfully done. . . . But New York refuses to believe.

It is strange, then, to leave New York and land in London, and find that ancient metropolis lending itself to the manufactured glamour of Hollywood with all the *naïveté* of some small out-of-the-way community that America would describe as a "hick town."

Strange to see London taking it all seriously, discussing the personalities of the films as though they really mattered, accepting these strips of celluloid romance as though they were the real stories of real people, queuing up in their thousands to bathe in the glow of the screen, paying by the million—really by the million—because they can hear the

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

voice of Mr. Al Jolson, a New York Jewish comedian, singing pathetically about his infant son.

No glamour in Hollywood, where the business of manufacture goes relentlessly on. No glamour in New York, which refuses to be hoodwinked so easily. But a flood of glamour in London, which is a much more sophisticated city than New York, and ought to know even better.

This is the sort of thing that really pains the friends of England in America. They like us for the best qualities that are in us, which are usually the best qualities that are in them, and they hate to see us prostrating ourselves to jazz and the movies, just as they hate to see the old buildings of London go, or the loss of anything that makes up the traditional English character and background.

Two nights after my return to London I went to one of our largest and newest film palaces. It is an almost faithful copy of the best, or worst, of this sort of thing that can be found in America. Here also the organ and orchestra came up, and played, and sank down again.

The first film was a ridiculous story of the young inhabitants of an American "rooming house," a quite idiotic and worthless episode in the lives of two American flappers and a young man. It was the most abysmal specimen possible of the worst kind of manufactured romance. The second picture showed the antics of two young men being turned into flying men on a Los Angeles aerodrome: a picture intended to show how American youth is worthily following the example of its elder brothers who flew in the war. This in London, on a spot close to where Zeppelin bombs used to fall—and may fall again!

It was a very pleasant audience, racially homogeneous and normal to a degree America can only dream about, a crowd such as no miracle could collect from Broadway. . . . And it was saddening to see the naïve and earnest way in which it was accepting, and even applauding, a pro-

SOME CONCLUSIONS

gramme which happened to be not Hollywood's best, but somewhere near Hollywood's worst. It would have been very mild justice if instead the audience had risen *en masse* and cried "Away with it!"

And just to show that this is not a view that belongs to me alone, but is one which is shared by many Americans, I will support it by an article written by Mr. Robert E. Sherwood in the New York *Evening Post* of January 12th, 1929. What Mr. Sherwood has here written a great many Americans think. Let us then draw on a typically New York moderate opinion concerning what has become this great question of the movies.

The writer says :

"The American in London is always amazed to observe how seriously the British public takes its movies. One would think that the natives of this highly civilised island would scorn the canned dramas that come from Southern California; but such is far from being the case. The average Englishman appears to be a singularly ardent and gullible fan.

"We Americans are apt to feel sheepishly ashamed because we make such a fuss over the representatives of royalty who occasionally visit our democratic shores. We gathered in mobs to gape at King Albert of Belgium, the Prince of Wales, Queen Marie of Rumania and many lesser notables. But our demonstrations of enthusiasm for King, Queen or Prince have been as nothing compared to the demonstrations which have greeted Adolphe Menjou, Tom Mix, Jackie Coogan and other American stars when they visited London.

"When a ship bearing Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford arrived off the British coast it was met by a squadron of aeroplanes that dropped roses on the decks. Wherever Doug and Mary went in England they were literally overwhelmed by their adoring but obstreperous admirers. Doug has told me that even when they were invited to mingle with the nobility, they found themselves

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

among fans who wanted to know 'What is Charlie Chaplin like?' 'Is Colleen Moore happily married?' and 'Is Hollywood really so very immoral?' 'I met one charming old Duchess,' said Doug, 'who knows a great deal more about the technical side of motion pictures than I ever did.' It was his observation that the Dukes and Earls are just as extreme in their devotion to the cinema as are the 'Arrys and 'Arriets.

"When Adolphe Menjou visited London with his bride last spring he was treated as though he were a god who had descended straight from Olympus. This pleasant and competent Cornell graduate from Cleveland, Ohio, was accepted as the world's ideal of perfection in breeding, manner, social grace and dress. London tailors and outfitters fought for his indorsement, just as Chicago haberdashers would fight for the indorsement of the Prince of Wales. The London papers were crowded with pictures of him, interviews with him and articles on the various aspects of his personality. There was one series of articles signed by a titled lady, which purported to set forth Mr. Menjou's secrets of love.

"Two magnificent picture palaces lately have been opened in London. One is the Empire, constructed by Metro-Goldwyn on the site of the old Empire Music Hall. The other is the Regal.

"Both of these magnificent temples are designed along the extravagant lines that are familiar enough to movie-goers in North America. They are filled with gilt paint, costly carpets, marble statuary, disappearing symphony orchestras, crystal chandeliers and all manner of elaborate appointments. They have given the British movie-goer the supreme thrill of enjoying gaudy luxuries, that are not even to be equalled in Buckingham Palace.

"There has been much speculation as to how British audiences would take to the talkies, and it was freely predicted that, however they might feel about the Vitaphone and Movietone, they would never accept the raucous American accents that went with them.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

"In spite of which, talking pictures from Hollywood have been received more cordially in London than they were in Kansas City. Most large London theatres are now wired for sound. Al Jolson in *The Singing Fool* has scored the same triumph over there that he scored over here.

"All of which leads to a strange and disturbing thought: the tremendous number of American movies that have been shown in England have caused the younger folk of that venerable kingdom to adapt American styles of jazz, chewing gum, slang and wearing apparel; it has even been complained that American films have introduced that awful American institution, the cocktail, into England, and have thereby caused British youth to flame.

"Now, with the advent of the talkies, it is entirely possible that the American accent will become standard throughout those nations which once spoke English. We shall hear Cockney flappers trying to talk like Clara Bow. What, indeed, is this world coming to?"

This article, by the way, was syndicated all over the United States. It is a pity it wasn't syndicated all over the British Empire.

Sooner or later, of course, in any discussion of the United States, we must come to the subject of Prohibition. It is as synonymous with the American scene as the Statue of Liberty and skyscrapers.

And what, after ten years' experience of this "noble experiment," is there new to say of it?

Well, the American newspapers contrive to say something new every day. It was long ago that the wits pointed out that Prohibition had saved dinner-parties, even if by some miracle they happened to be "dry"; that unfailingly there was a subject concerning which all men and women could be interesting. It is true still. Wherever men and women gather, as the cocktails are handed round, they talk

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

about liquor—whence it comes, what it costs, what its quality is, what its effects are.

And it makes it so pleasant for the stranger. He can contribute his mite of intelligent conversation with the greatest of ease :

“ It’s really astonishing. One reads about it—but you can’t realise it until you come here. Plenty of drink about, of course, of a sort and at a price—but the trouble is that you can’t have just the drink you want when you want. . . . Wine, for instance. One can’t get that. . . . I wonder how you stand it.”

“ Yes, but what can we do ? ”

Exactly, what can they do, with the Prohibition Amendment embedded in the unyielding concrete of the Constitution ?

Anyhow, everybody has something to talk about, which helps to make life interesting. And day by day the newspapers embroider the theme with an ingenuity which compels one’s admiration. But the events of the day support them very much here. There is always some new crime, some new extravagance of fanatical Puritanism, some new hypocrisy to help them along. A woman, under a new State law, is sentenced to prison for life because she was found selling a bottle of whisky. Mr. Grover Whalen starts his drive on the New York speak-easies, and smashes up a dozen or so out of the twenty-five thousand that exist. There are the periodical machine-gun massacres arising out of the gang wars of the Chicago beer barons. There is always something. America pours out sensational news in a fashion that would drive an English editor into a nursing home.

And perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of the mass of crime and corruption produced by Prohibition is the attitude to it throughout all these years of by far the greater proportion of the United States newspapers.

One may say that almost every American newspaper of

SOME CONCLUSIONS

standing is dead against Prohibition, and is constantly fighting it tooth and nail. Considering the subterranean power which the "drys" possess, the ingenious methods of pressure and compulsion which exist in the United States, and the general desire of "big business" to keep the working man sober, one would have expected to see many leading newspapers changing their allegiance from "wet" to "dry." But nothing of the kind seems to have happened, and it is a great tribute to the American press. They are like so many rocks in a sea of illicit liquor and lawlessness, and day by day they hammer away at the hypocrisy of it all; day by day they "feature" the crime that results from diverting liquor from open channels into ways that are dark and dangerous. Not one of them ever suggests the return of the days of the corner saloon. But having rid herself of that political and social evil, America is now urgently in need of a sane application of liquor laws to hotels, restaurants, and cafés. The improvement of existence if people could obtain even light alcoholic refreshment with their meals, particularly beers and wines, would be enormous. Without it the business of eating throughout the United States has become one cloying sameness. It simply isn't a country fit for men to live in, for that reason alone.

Some observers might say that, in view of the ceaseless warfare waged by the press against the evils of Prohibition, it is a very poor tribute to its power that all its efforts do nothing whatever to alter the present state of things. But that is to misunderstand the function of the press. It may not always be able to win battles, at any given moment, but it can at least keep an ideal alive, and in this case it is the ideal of personal liberty. The citadel of Liberty was captured by a ruse. So far there has been no possibility of reversing that unfortunate result. Nobody can yet see any way of doing it. But that something will happen, some day, is certain. America is drifting into such a tangle of crime

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

and corruption that some day something must explode. We may even see a re-birth on an immensely wider scale of that system of Vigilantes which in the old days created some sort of order out of the disorder of the pioneer West. The average decent citizen may some day have to take to direct action for the sake of his country. It may be that only some sort of civil war will deliver America from her present dilemma, and perhaps some day the usual Man will arise to do the job. In the meantime the newspapers—and America has many splendid newspapers—are the only hope of the ordinary citizen. If they had been “bought,” then the crime organisations which control the liquor supply would have had no check whatever on their operations.

All that one can be sure about with regard to what is called Prohibition is that it has produced a dreadful mess, and that its full history has not yet run. Nothing in human affairs remains static, and it may be taken for granted that the Prohibition tangle will become even worse before it is made better. Some day even America may become nationally indignant about the rule of its gangsters, whose chief source of prosperity is liquor. Or perhaps some day America will produce a president—perhaps has done already—who will face facts at home and not worry so much about what is happening abroad. There is one very good reason why America should avoid foreign entanglements, which is that, despite all her prosperity, she has infinitely more need to put things right within her own borders than has any other civilised country.

Which brings one inevitably to the subject of crime in the United States, this problem having now become inextricably mixed with that of Prohibition.

When Mr. Al Smith and Mr. Hoover were contesting for the Presidency, neither candidate, so far as I observed, had the slightest reference to make to crime, although it is true that since his election President Hoover has been very out-

SOME CONCLUSIONS

spoken on the subject. There is every reason why he should be, because this is undoubtedly America's greatest domestic problem, one which is universal and ever on the increase. Everywhere in the United States imposing schools and universities have been built. College men are being turned out by mass production, and college women with them. The genuflections that are made to the ideal of education are only surpassed by the conventional public worship of the female sex. Yet everywhere the crack of the gun-man's automatic goes merrily on, and the liaison between police and crime in every city is—speaking generally—on the most harmonious plane.

As the *Los Angeles Times* put it, during a period of political excitement :

“While the orators are declaiming about the wonderful opportunities America offers to even the humblest citizen, we must not overlook the Pennsylvania policeman who saved 140,000 dollars in two years.”

Thus each city watching, with cynical interest, the “clean-ups” in other cities. As it happened, during the period I spent in Los Angeles there was a very considerable “clean-up” going on there. High judicial officials, and humble police officials, were equally involved. One of the principal meeting-places for the transaction of business had been a small Jewish tailor's shop. The more deeply these affairs were probed by a Grand Jury in almost continuous session, the more unpleasant and involved they proved to be. I began to cut out from the newspapers these daily revelations of a city's maladministration. Day by day the pile of newspapers in my bedroom grew higher, to the despair of the chambermaid. Making desperate efforts with the scissors to bring matters up to date, I found myself entwined in endless serpentines of corruption. The task became too great. I gave it up. What is one city's subterranean affairs among so many?

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Every country has its crime, and a certain type of crime—arising from poverty or jealousy, anger or despair—seems inevitable to human nature, although in England we seem to have brought it somewhere near the irreducible minimum. But killing as a result of mere lawlessness is very rare with the English. In America it flourishes as nowhere else in the world. The Balkans—the picturesque, warring Balkans—are safer to the innocent wayfarer than the average American city at night.

Americans who have grown up with these frontier conditions do not, of course, realise them to the extent the stranger does, but even so their eyes are fairly wide open to the situation. The more serious ones are very concerned about it. There are constant evidences of this concern in the newspapers and periodicals. But even they do not get that same violent “reaction” to such conditions as does the visiting Englishman, even though in this respect they are constantly and wistfully holding up England as a model of law and order, which they would be very happy to see America able to copy.

In writing about this question of crime one is conscious of the feeling that Americans would much prefer one to leave it alone. One may write, and welcome, about the spread of free education, but not about the spread of unrestricted villainy. One can sympathise up to a point with this attitude. All peoples would prefer strangers to find in them only qualities which are admirable, and there is no doubt that the visitor who is prepared to find only things that please him in the United States is bound to be very much liked in return.

But how is it possible to shut one's eyes to what is undoubtedly the outstanding phenomenon of American life to-day? How can one write, even sympathetically or admiringly, of the great American scene without not merely mentioning but stressing the universality of crimes of violence in every city?

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Fortunately, since I made my own observations concerning this matter, there has come striking support of such a view from the highest quarter. Mr. Hoover, in his fight for what we may well call the American Throne, did not discuss the question of crime. But President Hoover, speaking from the Throne, has shown a very different temper. In his first public pronouncement as President, on April 22nd, 1929, and speaking to that great news organisation known as the Associated Press of America, he admitted that "life and property in the United States are less safe than in any other country in the world." This is from a President who happens to know most of the other countries of the world very well.

He made the astounding statement that there are nine thousand murders annually in the United States—and one might mention here that some students of this matter say that the available statistics do not give the full facts *—and went on to say :

"I am wondering whether the time has not come to realise that we are confronted with a national necessity of the first degree ; that we are not suffering from an ephemeral crime wave, but from a subsidence of our foundations."

That is the sort of thing I was feeling throughout my observations of the United States. And that sentence of President Hoover's must surely be the gravest indictment of American crime yet made within America. Its gravity lies

* Mr. Wade H. Ellis, of the Crime Commission of the American Bar, and a former Assistant Attorney-General of the United States, has since given the annual figure as 12,000, this statement being made both on the wireless and in an address delivered at Washington. He says further that crime costs the United States £2,600,000,000 a year. According to him there are 30,000 criminals at large in New York and 10,000 in Chicago. (This would hardly seem to be giving Chicago a fair allowance !) He adds that the real American stock contributes little to these figures, and that the crime statistics are chiefly provided by emigrants from Europe, or the recent descendants of emigrants.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

not merely in what is said but in who said it. It is interesting that in this same speech he made some striking comparisons between crime in his own country and in Great Britain.

And further to show that my own insistence on the subject of crime is not the mere obsession of a visitor, too keenly and too critically alive to one aspect of the American scene among so many others, and perhaps too anxious to stress the importance of what must be an unpleasant subject for Americans, especially when discussed by a visitor, I will quote the words of Chief Justice Taft, ex-President of the United States and the only ex-President who has served as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

He was asked by his interviewer, in the *Evening World* of January 9th, 1929 :

“What relation, if any, do you see between this lust for wealth at any cost and the problem of organised crime that is challenging the Government of every large city in the country?”

“‘There is a problem,’ the Chief Justice replied, ‘which unquestionably menaces our civilisation. Our entire machinery of justice must be geared up to cope with it. Our police forces, our prosecuting organisations and our court system must all be improved until we are able to subdue these criminal organisations. . . . The nation does not yet appear to be fully awakened to the seriousness of this problem.’”

After that, perhaps, the visitor may go on without feeling that he is discussing a forbidden subject. And it reminds me that a very well-known New York magistrate, discussing these questions with me, declared that he would never dream of being mad enough to go for a stroll in Central Park at night. That is the difference between New York and London. A man who strolls in Hyde Park after nightfall may just possibly find himself in the police court next morning. (It would largely depend on what kind of lady he

SOME CONCLUSIONS

met and what sort of adventures attract him.) But the man who strolled in Central Park after nightfall would almost certainly find himself in the morgue. As a stranger he might even take a considerable risk in driving through it alone in a taxi.

The average American, discussing crime, will say in effect : " Nearly all of these murders are gang murders, and the more enthusiastically they kill each other the better we are pleased." There is a certain amount of both truth and wisdom in this point of view, and if such a system could end in one grand climacteric of gang murdering in which one-half the thugs and beasts who infest American city life killed the other half, it would be perfect.

But such a consummation will never happen, and meanwhile, in making this inevitable comment on their crime problem, Americans do not realise that they are making the most damaging accusation possible against their own social achievement. If gang warfare, and the inevitable terrorism it exercises on the average citizen, coupled with the business relations it must inevitably have with the police, is accepted as a normal concomitant of American life, then America is still in essence a frontier country, and her claims to be the present leader in civilisation collapse at once.

But it is not true that the great majority of America's crimes comes from the gangs. Apart from the many murders which result from bootlegging, hi-jacking, racketeering, and other forms of criminal organisation, there is an immense amount of plain murdering in the United States of every possible kind, due to the actions of individuals. Some of these are domestic, more of them belong to the street. Every city has a plentiful supply of underworld rats, armed with automatic pistols as a matter of course. The hold-up is practised everywhere ; kidnapping, both of children and adults, is quite common. In San Francisco and in Los

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Angeles I met English mothers who told me that this fear for their children, going to and from school, was never quite absent from their minds. That feeling of utter security which is such a feature of English life that we never think of it is utterly lacking in America.

Any flat or house, in any country in the world, may produce its unlikely tragedy of jealousy or anger. These are private wars. But in America any street, any road, anywhere may produce its armed bandit, quite determined to take your money, and careless as to whether or not you lose your life in the process. Your only business is to obey the word of command, and quickly. The fact that a stranger may travel round the United States and have no such experience proves nothing. The newspapers are there for his information.

This is a state of things which among the civilised nations is peculiar to the United States. One might expect it in China or Mexico, but the fact remains that you are more likely to find it in America. It needs only a brief glance backwards on the history of the United States to realise how such a state of things has come to pass, or rather has always existed. The alien, low-grade, ill-digested elements of the population are the cause of most of it. In the past the Irish were responsible for a great deal, and it would have been infinitely better for American politics and administration if England's settlement with Ireland had happened a hundred years earlier, because there would have been fewer Irish in America to cause trouble. Since the palmy days of the Irish, the Russian Jew and the Italian have come to show just what lawlessness can be among those who have a natural genius for it. Side by side with the inevitable lawlessness of a pioneer country the cities have grown up from nothing, have copied from the wilderness the law of the jungle, and made a dingy side street in a new city more dangerous than ever was an Indian trail. We used to think that the "Wild

SOME CONCLUSIONS

and Woolly West " was not too safe a place, with its notorious "bad men." But the modern gun-man of the cities has made the old type look like an amateur, and the arrival of Prohibition made the species flourish like rats in a sewer.

Nothing could be too bad for this type of American criminal. Wholesale *noyades* of them—to recall one of the details of the French Revolution—would be admirable. If whole barge loads of America's city rats, from millionaire beer barons to the "meanest" street thugs, were sunk simultaneously in the harbours of San Francisco and New York, it would be a splendid thing for the United States. Perhaps only by some such wholesale extermination will America ever really get the better of her crime problem.

America is not the only country which has been faced by this problem, but America is the only country which has failed to grapple with it, which indeed finds the menace constantly growing in intensity. It cannot now be explained away by saying that until comparatively recently it was really a pioneer country. Cross the border into Canada, and the change is magical. The fame of the Royal North-West Mounted Police is known throughout the United States; every inhabitant knows that this force "always gets its man." In Australia, where he-men and the great open spaces also abound, which has its own share of political problems and its own share of "toughs," the Ned Kelly gang of many years ago represented the last expiring flutter of organised banditry. South Africa has its coloured problems, but no gun-men. India, the most complex country in the world, where racial antipathy is normally fanatical, has had no organised murder societies since the British discovered the extraordinary organisation of the Thugs—and ruthlessly stamped it out—more than a century ago. It would seem that among the English-speaking peoples, wherever the British flag, or some modification of it, waves,

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

life is safe and murder at a discount, and that wherever Old Glory waves circumstances are glorious for the assassin.

Here is something for Americans to think about. And to do them justice, they do, to some considerable extent, and would willingly adopt our methods and results in this respect, if they knew how.

But America has been so engrossed in the race for material development that some other things have been lost sight of. She has had quick prosperity, but has neglected civic security. She has our laws, or the basis of them, but doesn't know how to apply them. In my own opinion, her conscious veering away from the English idea, which began with the Revolution, was all to the bad for new America. If she had followed the English instead of the Irish idea, it would have been much better for her. If even fifty years ago there had been the same tendency to see something good in the English, after all, as happily exists to-day, we should see a much better America now. But there was a very definite estrangement for nearly a hundred and fifty years, and America, which has done so much and learned so much in that time, has by no means learned everything.

It is still possible, one is assured, to hire a professional assassin in Chicago, who will "bump off" somebody you don't like for a fee of a hundred dollars. The same service also functions, if one's informants are to be trusted, in New York, at about the same price.

In Chicago "the professional bomb thrower, officers said, receives all the way from 50 dollars to 700 dollars and cab fare for his work." The cab fare is a delightful touch. A Federal Prohibition agent bids a girl in a motor-car to stop. She, thinking, with every reason, that he is a bandit, drives on, is shot and dangerously wounded. The Prohibition agent is later fined five dollars. A man out duck shooting is ambushed, shot, and killed by another Prohibition agent, because the agent thinks he may be running liquor. Nothing

SOME CONCLUSIONS

happens to the agent. Thus the simple citizen in America gets it, as the saying there is, both going and coming. He may be killed either by law or lawlessness, and with next to no risk to the killer of either kind.

Mr. Brisbane, in that wonderful daily staccato column of his, describes a similar incident :

“ Without going to war you may find excitement and danger in American cities. Leroy Gilbert, police chief of South Chicago Heights, was shot dead as he sat at his window. He had annoyed gangsters, and his killing was ‘ in the regular course.’ Two brothers and friends of Gilbert formed a posse to hunt the killers.

“ They ordered an automobile to stop. The driver said afterwards : ‘ I thought they were hold-up men, and, yelling to Thomas Scanlon, on the back seat, to duck, I drove through them.’ Scanlon, newspaper pressman, having nothing to do with the police chief’s murder, was dead on his back seat when the posse stopped firing.

“ The posse is sorry about it, and wonders why the automobile did not stop. The citizen driving a car in these Prohibition-bootleg-gangman days hardly knows when to stop. The signal may come from Prohibition agents, searching cars for whisky. It may come from highwaymen, from kidnapers, or any one of a dozen criminals. It would seem almost better to have beer back again, and not be shot or kidnaped so often.”

Indeed, whatever the observer of the United States may say or think about the twin subjects of crime and Prohibition is backed up a hundredfold by what appears daily in the newspapers.

America must learn to rule her crime, or crime will end by completely ruling her. The situation is almost bad enough to warrant a civil war to end it, and indeed some sort of civil war may some day be the necessary reply of the decent citizen to the great problem of crime which, in the words of the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

Court, " unquestionably menaces our civilisation." These words mean precisely what they say, and no less, and America will not free herself from this terrible evil by " forgetting " it.

Some sort of drastic Federal, nation-wide action may be necessary, something that is above the law of separate states. A British army of constabulary, say thirty thousand strong, plenitfully supplied with aeroplanes, able to swoop rapidly from city to city, and invested with absolute power in whatever city they happen to be operating in for the time being, might clear up the situation in two or three years. The only way to abolish the American gun-man will be for the nation to make war on him.

I am thinking of an organisation like the old Royal Irish Constabulary, or even more like the " Black and Tans," who were sneered at even in England, which ought to have known better, but who had obtained the upper hand in a most desperate situation when the Treaty with Ireland put an end to their operations.

But all that, of course, is only a pretty fancy.

Chief Justice Taft says :

" First of all we must detect and capture the criminals. This means a larger and better organised police force in every state and city. It will cost some money, but in proportion to the menace that confronts us it will be cheap at almost any price.

" Every state should, in my opinion, have an efficient constabulary. It should be organised not only to patrol the rural districts and the state highways, but also to reinforce the police force of towns and cities whenever conditions make it necessary."

He goes on to say that, having caught the criminal, means must be found to see that he is convicted.

" It is a disgrace to our country that so many criminals with large resources at their command have been able

SOME CONCLUSIONS

to avoid paying the penalty of their misdeeds. . . . If we can perfect our police systems and our court procedure, I have no doubt that within a reasonable time we can bring under control even the most aggressive gangs which are now preying upon our cities and states."

It will not be quite so easy as that sounds. It will indeed be a task worthy of a modern Lincoln, if one can be found. . . . Perhaps the United States will find in President Hoover the man they are waiting for.*

A great figure is Mr. Brisbane in the life of the United States. He is read daily by millions, and this is a detail that matters. Of benevolent aspect, slightly acidulated, one may say that as regards England he is full of the sour milk of human kindness. He discovers, for instance, that the guns

* Some time after writing this I was fortunate in receiving a copy of the *Illinois Crime Survey*, published under the auspices of the Illinois Association for Criminal Justice. This wonderful volume of 1,100 pages is a most careful study and analysis of every form of crime, corruption, and vice in Chicago and its immediate suburbs. It brings overwhelming evidence to show, if that were needed, that the extraordinary conditions for which Chicago is notorious could not exist but for the close co-operation between the master criminals on the one hand, and the politicians (who control the police) on the other. This sinister liaison, long a commonplace, has become increasingly powerful in recent years owing to the much greater amounts available for bribery as a result of Prohibition and wholesale bootlegging. However much England may read about America in the newspapers, she has no real conception of how deeply this canker has eaten into American life; of how utterly criminal the background of many American politicians, outwardly respectable, may be; of how closely allied such men are with wealthy ruffians who have lived by murder, many other kinds of violent crime, and the wholesale exploitation of houses of prostitution and gambling. This massive volume—which honours the many public-spirited citizens who have combined to produce it—not only gives us a scientific exposure of Chicago crime in all its ramifications, but enables us to understand how the gangster exists in such quantities. Almost always the product of fairly recent "foreign" immigration, he is brought up in neighbourhoods where crime and political corruption are accepted as the normal standards. There the gun-man is a hero and the ordinary man who works for a living is a fool. The gangster belongs to a world utterly his own. He can no more understand the decent citizen, reared

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

of Bermuda (which is British) are pointed menacingly at the United States, and a host of uninformed readers, mostly "foreigners," believe him.*

So the cry is for "Defence, defence, defence." In a Sunday supplement printed in every great city is a striking drawing of what Washington would look like after a hostile aerial visitation. The menace does not come from Canada, or Mexico. It must be from Bermuda.

Which brings us to that difficult source of discussion between Britain and the United States, the naval question.

This is not the place to discuss on the usual lines such a grave and technical subject. I am of opinion that behind all that has been said about this thorny question, ever since the days of the Washington Conference, on to the Geneva Three-Power Conference, and since, there lurk simple, even

outside such areas, than the decent citizen can understand him. The gangster, who may easily be a murderer several times over, only becomes indignant in the very unlikely event of his receiving a sentence, however small. Then he at once jumps to the conclusion that somebody who has been highly paid to look after him has "double-crossed" him. The *Illinois Crime Survey* shows that unless this special mentality of the gangster is understood the immense problems he causes can never be properly approached. He lives in his licensed Alsatia (although now the leaders are living where they please) and the rest of the world is merely there to be preyed on. So dire is the situation that it does not seem fantastic to suggest that some day the decent elements of the population might also band themselves together and, without bothering overmuch about a venal police, take unto themselves their own machine-guns and attempt to "clean-up" once and for all a state of things unprecedented in all the history of civilisation. But the problem probably lies even more with the venal politician than the gangster. They have the ground already prepared for the adolescent gangster, Italian or otherwise. Without politicians who live on graft there would be no crime syndicates organised as carefully, and almost as openly, as any great industrial corporation. That simple statement shows at once the almost insuperable difficulties that confront all good Americans in their desire to bring American life into line with the average civilised conception of it, and to eliminate within a reasonable space of years the evils that have arisen as a result of unrestricted immigration and bad politics in the past.

* It is very possible that there are no guns that matter at Bermuda, but Mr. Brisbane would not let a small detail like that worry him.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

primitive, human impulses which are of much more importance in such a discussion between nations than any hard facts, however incontrovertible.

Rendered in its simplest form the Anglo-American naval question comes to this:

“ Britain *needs* a big navy, and is not quite sure whether she can afford it.

“ America *wants* a big navy, and is quite sure that she can afford it.”*

That is really “ all there is to it.” The experiences of the war showed what tiny Britain with its scattered Empire needs in order to survive. Britain knows, from very sharp experience, that she needs a navy capable of holding its own and rather more with any other, otherwise England may some day cease to mean what she has meant so long, and what is known as the British Empire would no longer exist.

But why, after all, should this point of view appeal to the United States, considered as a nation? It would certainly do so to very many thousands of individual Americans, because they would very much rather see us survive than not, and know instinctively that a hostile impulse will never come from our side. But to that vast body of opinion which is represented by Uncle Sam (now rather enjoying the rôle of Uncle Samson) one and indivisible, the safety of Britain and the permanency of the British Empire mean nothing in particular. They would certainly mean nothing if anything concerning them happened to ruffle the amour-propre of the United States.

* It is worth while reflecting on what would have been the effect in America of England having had at the Geneva naval conference a “nigger in the woodpile” in the shape of William B. Shearer. Such an incident, so suggestive of “double-crossing,” would have violently coloured America’s political attitude to England for the next half-century. In England the revelation of the subterranean activities of Mr. Shearer in favour of a big American navy did not cause the slightest rise in political or newspaper temperature.

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

The United States are, or think they are, the most powerful nation in the world to-day. They are certainly by far the most wealthy. Therefore, if they want a big navy to play with, who is there to stop them?

America feels she needs some such outlet for that lustily growing patriotic ardour which has blossomed so fiercely since the Hollywood era came in. A big navy is the easiest way of creating it. A big army would be a nuisance. People would have to serve in it, and the American citizen has no use for peace-time soldiering, whatever he may think of it in time of war. And, anyhow, a big army would be ridiculous.

But a big navy does—or would do—just what is necessary. It gives New York and Chicago, Omaha, Topeka, Houston, and all the other widely scattered cities, a common interest that draws them all together. It may be true that the Middle West has never heard of the ocean, but it has begun to hear of the United States Navy. It is something for which California can lie down with its great rival Florida, and New York with Chicago. And it supplies a little of what European nations have had so much of—colour, glory, waving plumes, *la panache*.

Besides, it brings in the Marines, and to the United States the Marines are something prodigiously romantic, who supply the military element which every nation really loves, secretly or otherwise. To the Americans, the Marines are so many Richards of the Lion Heart. I think they have a fancy that a battalion of Marines could wipe up any trouble, short of a first-class European war. Here also Hollywood has done its bit, and thus as military traditions decay in the Old World we see them beginning to flourish in the New, and flourishing not from any particular necessity, but from the perhaps natural desire for the outward expression of the latent strength and prosperity of a nation.

So that when we think or talk of the Anglo-American

SOME CONCLUSIONS

naval situation, we should forget such questions as reason, facts, and necessities, and think of even more powerful factors such as pride and nationalism. . . . And after all, if the British Empire says "Il faut vivre," the United States is quite entitled to reply, "Je n'en vois pas la nécessité."

And so the only thing for Britain to do in all this is to keep calm and let the United States consult their own desires. So far as America's big navy is a necessity, as Britain's is, it will be a bright and shining instrument such as a navy should be. But so far as it is a ministration to a national vanity it will probably not be quite so efficient as, say, that great factory of cash registers where everybody runs up and down on roller skates.

The quality of a navy is really the expression of how much it is needed, either for deliberate offence or very vital defence. Germany's was a very good navy indeed, because she had made up her mind to blow Britain right out of the navy business. Britain's navy has for centuries been a good one, because on it has depended her very existence as a nation—and still does. The quality of the United States navy, quite apart from size, will depend to a very great extent on how much it is the critical necessity Mr. Brisbane says it is, and how much it is a pretty luxury.

In short, it is American nationalism, prosperity, and the desire for still greater conquests in world commerce that we have to deal with, which latterly and not without some reason have been called American Imperialism. The future really depends on America; what she will think and do about things. Every real and reasonable American knows fairly well that trouble will never come from England. Our fault rather is that we are much too inclined to "back down" before the United States, an attitude which is really based on old sentiment, however foolish that may sound in cold print. But from a mixture of reason and instinct we shall probably always do that. It is on the whole well that we

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

should, although the weakness of such an attitude is that some day some unexpected "incident" may arise; that Britain, true to her peculiarly domestic diplomacy with the United States, will retreat under the pressure of a too-ardent republican imperialism—and find the moment inevitably arrive when she cannot retreat any farther.

The heady wine of power may affect republics as well as monarchies, presidents as well as monarchs. It is an attractive pastime for one nation to sway the affairs of the world, especially when it is a novelty and the nation concerned has almost persuaded itself that it is the finest the world has ever seen; even though it is a nation in which the emigrant ship and Ellis Island have played the parts that with England were played through the ages by the long boats and the glittering spears of the invader. No new-comers ever stayed in England without having to fight tooth and nail to get there, and stay there. Every ingredient in that older Melting Pot earned its place by the sword.

But perhaps, after all, the surest guarantee of future amity between Britain and the United States will lie in the fact that America has still so much to do internally before she is really on a level with the reputation she enjoys in the outside world; before what she is "measures up" to what she is internationally accepted as being. As one American said to me in New York: "Tell England to cease worrying about us, and what we think of her, and to be just herself. That's good enough. Never mind our Wops (American for Italians) and all the others. Those of us who really count, or think we do, want to see England drop this humble-pie business. It isn't good for us, and we don't really understand it. We've got so much to look after at home—problems of a kind you haven't got. It's your rôle to keep the Anglo-Saxon stock what it always has been, keep its ideals what we have been brought up to expect them to be. You in England can do it. Here in America we may

SOME CONCLUSIONS

find ourselves swamped. That's our biggest worry. We're afraid of being swamped."

Of all the Americans I met, this one was the most interesting to talk to, because he was at once easy and difficult. Easy because he agreed with practically everything I put forward about Britain's attitude; difficult because our general run of ideas were so perfectly attuned, that to hear his almost unvarying agreement on matters which it would be impossible to discuss with the average enlightened American made me feel that I was taking advantage of an unparalleled generosity of mind.

A writer, he had lived in England, and would live there again if circumstances permitted it. A good American, he yet felt that his own country was afflicted by "a neurotic and feminine temperament." England, he said, belonged first to herself, and then to Europe. Her future, he felt, whatever it may be, can never lie in an alliance—a cultural alliance—with America. The best Britain can hope for in America, he said, is a grudging truce based on common ideas which are more powerful in England, because undiluted, than in America.

His own country, he said—and he loved it for what he wanted it to be—is now imperialistic, the only one probably which contains a real menace to the world. He saw an America hoping for world conquest—commercial conquest, anyhow. (There is much to support that view, one detail among many being the hysterical anger of the American shipping companies because the Cunard Line put one ship on the winter holiday traffic between New York and Havana. Yet industrially depressed England is flooded with American motor-cars, and nobody grows angry about it, and America calmly lays immense plans for taking all the rest of Britain's motor-car trade, if she can.) He saw Canada coming into this, compelled by sheer force of circumstances, as part of a great industrial merger. (It was the one detail on which

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

we did not agree.) He was afraid that the Anglo-Saxon element in the United States would be submerged under the waves of aliens, yet admitted proudly that it had so far remained dominant, and pointed to the list of names of the American presidents. He was the one American I met who admitted that there was—in truth—an old, deep-seated, and curiously bitter antagonism against England (not Britain) which exists against no other country, largely due to what was for years taught in the schools. He also said that practically all the *foreign* elements in the United States find it easy or natural to dislike England, though they have never had the slightest connection with it, largely because it was for so long the fashion of their adopted country to do so.

In short, he said a great deal of what multitudes of Americans and British know to be true, but are the sort of things which are very rarely found in print, including a good deal that is not put down here.

Heaven only knows how much evil and misunderstanding we owe to America's long estrangement with England—"the Ancient Grudge" as Owen Wister called it. Perhaps it will never be put right, although it is true that the tendency is for this misconception to evaporate as modern America gradually comes to know her own history, as far as England is concerned, with more truth, as is the tendency.

I met Americans, charming and intelligent otherwise, who still regarded England as much the same kind of Imperialistic monster as was portrayed in the French and German comic papers at the time of the Boer War. They know little about it really; nothing of how the British Empire grew up largely by accident, and comparatively little by conquest; but they had heard this sort of thing all their lives, and it was ingrained. They don't know—or wouldn't admit—that America's acquisition of Texas was more barefaced than anything Britain has done for centuries, or that America has "eliminated" and even swindled her Indians in a way

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Britain has treated no subject race. One very nice American, a poet, said to me, with flashing eyes, "What are you doing in Egypt?" The short answer would have been that Egypt, with us, has been for quite a number of years what Hayti has been for a few short years with the United States, and that Egypt now is much more "free" than Hayti is, but I didn't think of it. Nor did I dare deliver a short lecture on Britain's various gestures during the past twenty years in South Africa, Egypt, Palestine, India, and Ireland, and indeed throughout the British Empire. It wouldn't be believed. Or if believed, it would be discounted as being due to some deep-laid cunning on our part.

Had I said, for instance, "England, which has swayed the greatest Empire the world has ever seen, is now the least imperialistic of nations," it would have been regarded as too extravagant even to be a joke. And who can blame them, seeing that for a hundred and fifty years the story has been told all wrong, and we have had no chance—and perhaps not sufficient desire—to put it right?

But despite all this, there is a distinct improvement in relations, or at any rate a distinct possibility of improvement, and even a desire for it. Perhaps because of that danger of submergence by "alien" elements of which my frankest of all Americans spoke, the Americans of the old stock are more alive to-day than ever they were to the old racial ties, the common heritage of thought, history, language, and literature which constitute their most precious possession.

That community of language is, in its way, one of the most amazing things in history. One may, indeed, describe the United States as the greatest school of English the world has ever seen. There at the present moment a hundred and twenty millions of mixed peoples are speaking English. With things as they are, naturally, the English is also mixed,

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

but as the newer elements are absorbed—so far as language is concerned—and with the flow of immigration under the quota regulations dropping from a torrent to little more than a trickle, so the all-round standard of English among the “foreign” populations of the United States will improve, until in a very few years the funny mongrel variations of our language at present spoken by the various European elements will be almost entirely a thing of the past. It only needs, at the most, another generation to remove it. Speaking of the United States after my return, one Londoner, who was an admirer of what the United States had accomplished during her period of nationhood, said, “Don’t forget that when America came into the war the daily orders at Fort Worth had to be posted up in forty-nine languages.” I don’t know whether or not this is correct, but certainly in twenty or thirty years’ time such a problem, in any similar crisis, would be almost entirely absent.

It is such a very ordinary and well-understood matter that the United States speak English that it seems quite banal to mention it. But the truth is that the more you look into it the more romantic it is. Here is one respect in which the Melting Pot is doing its job very quickly and efficiently. The sons and daughters of peasant immigrants are returning daily from their high-schools to teach their parents better English. That sort of thing, in some degree, is proceeding constantly all over the United States. One can imagine that in some family circles the process goes on amiably, and that in others it produces friction. The youngsters, proud of their easy acquirement of the dominating language, are inclined in many cases to be impatient of the halting efforts of their parents. It is certain that many of these young “Americans” have no desire to be bi-lingual, have no use for the “Dago” tongues of their forbears, and grow up entirely American in idea and—one may say it—entirely English in speech. Here is something which is of immense

SOME CONCLUSIONS

importance to that excellent league for good will, the English Speaking Union, which bases its efforts not so much on a community of race as on a community of language.

The most remarkable thing about English in the United States, indeed, is not its difference from the parent language, but its lack of difference. The old joke of "English spoken, American understood," is deader than any other joke ever known. The difference between the speech of the average educated American of the old stock and the average Englishman of the same type is next to nothing. Considering that there have been nearly three hundred years of time for variations to arise, and beget other variations, it is nothing short of amazing that the differences are so slight.

It means that in another three hundred years the two tongues will still be one. One guarantee of this is that whenever America makes an invention in speech of her own we are quick to adopt it, if it is a good one. There is no danger of the languages growing apart, whatever may happen to the two nations.

One further guarantee of this is that throughout the United States one finds no evidence of any desire to create, or even refer to, "the American language" as against "the English language." On the contrary, there is every desire, usually unconsciously expressed, to insist on the Englishness of the language. There are constant references to "good English," and the desirability of it. They are frank about their own deficiencies in this respect, and generous about our own manner of employing the common tongue—while, naturally enough, reserving to themselves the right to maintain a school of humour out of the affectations of certain English types. The many references to the necessity for "good English" that came with the birth of the talking film showed how free America is from any national complex in this respect.

It is perhaps the one major respect in which there is none

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

of that underlying feeling which perhaps we may call jealousy of things English, and no desire to be different. After all, to call it "the English language" is a guarantee of the authenticity and the historical richness of the tongue which the United States themselves use. When the commander of the Graf Zeppelin landed near New York and the reporters rushed to meet him, it was noted with surprise and commendation that he spoke, not in German, but "in very good English."

This use of the word "English," then, will never disappear from the United States. It will never be displaced by the word "American." It is the one thing concerning which one can say with certainty they will never have any desire to be "different." If the United States ever feels called upon to address an ultimatum to Great Britain it will be couched in the very best English. It is a comforting thought. Just as there is a definite movement in business and industry to create more politeness because it pays, so there is growing a desire to maintain the best possible English. But not because it pays. This is something of the spirit. America may be new in many ways : but its language is a great and historic one, naturally acquired, and belonging as much to it as it does to the country of its origin. And year by year this great school of English is turning out more and more millions who speak it well. . . . More and better English.

So powerful is this influence that we may even hope that it will, to a considerable extent, offset that "swamping" by alien elements of which the Americans of the old stock are so afraid. The son of peasants from Poland or the Ukraine goes to high-school and the university and studies in a language which leads him to a literature that makes the world a different place from anything it could ever have been to him in the home of his parents. Something of the Anglo-Saxon as well as the American idea must grow up

SOME CONCLUSIONS

in a receptive mind, and the sons of such parents find themselves hungry to go to England and Europe because of what they have read in English books. It does happen, and with the new tendency on the part of Americans of the old stock to see more of affinity with the Old Country than earlier generations were prepared to see, it may grow.

Perhaps this tendency may even mean that out of the long twilight of Anglo-American misunderstanding is emerging at last a real spiritual concord; that we shall both forget that unfortunate interlude which began with the Boston Tea Party, and think more of all that went before it, and all that is to come; that for the sake of those ideals for which both divisions stand, the two branches of the race that are separated by the broad Atlantic and to which—shall we say?—the *Oxford Book of Verse* brings precisely the same emotional experience, will find it more pleasant to agree about the things that matter than disagree about the things that don't.

If not this, then it must mean, even if only gradually, a greater divergence as the years roll on, despite this wonderful community of language. It is not impossible for France and America to allow for each other's differences. But the similarities of England and the United States must either make us know each other better or like each other less. We shall not mind America being the prosperous younger brother if only she is prepared to put up with our curious little ways as the elder one. Elder brothers may not get on quite so well in the world, but they have a weakness for being deferred to in matters that usually don't really matter so very much.

There is undoubtedly a movement now towards knowing each other better than we have ever done before. More and more Americans are coming to England and Europe, finding here so much that all their prosperity can never give them at home—in *their* time. There are so many Americans

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

hungry for the European touch, some of them desiring particularly the English touch ; many who would live over here if they could see their way to do it, even though their fellow-countrymen would call them, with slight scorn, " expatriates." One must visit them at home to understand all this ; to understand how the many details of life, historic, picturesque, and colourful, which we take entirely for granted, shine out to American eyes. . . . Despite the wealth of the New World, the Old World can still be sure of the best out of life for many years to come.

For my own part, my experiences in the United States taught me the supreme lesson of appreciating Britain and Europe—their variety, colour, and flavour ; their richness in history, in the achievements of great men, and the arts of past centuries—with a keenness I had never felt before. The United States of America cannot begin to compare in the deeper interests of life with the disunited States of Europe. But this pageant of the past and present is something we do not want to keep jealously for ourselves, but to share as freely and naturally as possible with America. My visit to America also made me feel that whenever I meet an American in London (that dear old town where even many of the taxicabs are precious museum pieces), I shall be very interested to know what city he comes from and glad to make him feel, however slightly, more at home in an older city which—quite possibly—he is wanting to feel is as much his spiritual home as mine.

The more Americans there are who feel that, the better it will be for us all. There will come a time, some day far distant in the future, when this question of history and tradition as between one side of the Atlantic and the other will be so levelled up that America's own spiritual needs in this respect will be amply satisfied at home. In those days New York will be hoary with traditions, many of them but dimly comprehended ; Chicago will have its Quartier Latin

SOME CONCLUSIONS

or its Soho, and some day rediscover a sort of *Beggar's Opera* based on the exploits of the romantic gunmen and hijackers of olden times ; San Francisco will have its erudite historians able to enlighten their fellow-citizens on the little-known episodes of the Forty-Niners and the Great Earthquake and Fire ; and the indolent inhabitants of Los Angeles, softened by many generations of existence in a too-perfect climate, will learn with a languid astonishment that their quaint old city was once of very great extent and vigour, and sheltered certain people called film stars who in their time made quite a stir in the world.

But those days are far, very far, distant in the future, and in the long meantime we must hope that America will appreciate us for all we have been and are, and that we shall appreciate America for all she is and is to be.

ENVOI

SHORTLY AFTER MY RETURN from the United States, I was asked by a well-known American monthly review to give some general impressions of America "in lighter vein." Under the title of "Ulysses in America," I gave them the following :

What do they know of America who have merely run up and down the United States for three or four months ?

Here we encounter one of the primary difficulties in the way of an Englishman discovering America. Life doesn't really afford time enough. If he goes to New York for a week or so he is told : "That is not America. You ought to have gone to Chicago." If he makes it a week more and takes in Chicago, he is told : "That is all very well, but you ought to have seen more of the Middle West and gone to St. Louis." And if he spends three or four months running round most of the country he tells himself that it is only a beginning, that it might be presumptuous to write or draw conclusions about America on such moderate acquaintance, and that to do the job properly would take years.

And at the mere mention of such an idea, I seem to hear the senior and sleepy partner of the Two Black Crows drawling, "You can't do that." It is quite true. It can't be done. Which means that no Englishman will ever really discover America. If he remained there long enough for the job his perceptions would become blunted and his palate vitiated, probably by bath-tub gin. To know exactly what the United States, or any foreign country, is like you must remain a stranger all the time you are looking on. You must be able at any moment to recapture that first astounding thrill with which you see a large policeman—though

ENVOI

probably not so large as a London policeman—walking down Fifth Avenue twirling his club. This sight to the intelligent Englishman is just as amazing as would be the spectacle of an elephant deftly climbing the Woolworth Building.

It is true that all our lives in England we have been familiar with the fact that New York policemen openly twirl their clubs. But reading about it is only one thing. Seeing it is another. In England people live long lifetimes without ever seeing what is called a policeman's truncheon. If some misguided bobby flourished his truncheon in the Strand there would be questions in Parliament and another scandal at Scotland Yard.

To my own keen regret, after I had been in New York a week, the sight of a cop twirling his nightstick failed to arouse in me its original thunderous impression. I recognised this sadly as the first symptom in the process of becoming what America calls acclimated. I was getting used to things. On my first day somebody took me, all a-quiver, up the Woolworth Building. On my fifth I wouldn't have gone up it for a thousand dollars. After a month I resolutely refused to look at it.

And therein lies the real difficulty of discovering America. One becomes used to it too soon. There is no language obstacle in the way, so that everything can be picked up at once. And this, which is regarded as a commonplace, is really the greatest marvel of all—if we all thought about it aright: the thrilling fact that the policeman in New York, the taxi-driver in Kansas City, and the man behind the counter at the Brown Derby at Los Angeles all speak pretty well the same language that I do; that between the English and all these people there is not one-thousandth per cent. of the difference in speech that exists between the inhabitants of Dover and the denizens of Boulogne.

One falls at once into this trap, and it helps to persuade

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

one that things are very much the same ; that because the two countries speak alike the two peoples think and act alike.

For the Englishman really to interpret America, he would have to repeat to himself every morning as he turned the water into his nice porcelain bath : " Once more to-day I shall meet the miracle of everybody speaking English." Then he would have to keep his impressions so virginal that the emotions on first seeing a New York policeman playing with his club would be repeated, undiminished, when he saw a policeman doing it in Chicago, when he saw another one doing it in San Francisco, when he saw a skyscraper in Houston, Texas, and when he saw a Jim Crow street car in New Orleans. And he would have to keep on doing this for two or three years, in order to know all America ; and live in small places where people swing to and fro on the front porch, and keep his mind terrifically alert all the time, and refuse to be lulled into the belief that because he can understand every word Mr. Brisbane writes he knows all about it.

And as the senior Mr. Crow says, you can't do that. It is impossible to go on running round America for two or three years, keeping a virginal mind all the time, stifling that splendid natural impulse which demands Bass out of a bottle, and drinking coffee with your meals. The Englishman who could do this for three years would either be getting a large salary from America or would have run away from a wife in England. If the salary was very large he would probably become acclimated. If the wife was very large, he would probably be content anyway, and anywhere.

The only way to ensure that England should know *all* about America would be by arrangement between the two Governments—that is presuming that anything ever could be arranged between those two Governments. There would then be carefully selected from England a writer who was

ENVOI

learned, wise, and witty (if there should be one such), and one accustomed, or even pleased, to remain away from home for long stretches of time. By arrangement with Washington he would be allowed to take with him, wherever he went, his own private cellar, supplemented by a French *chef* and an English cook, just to vary the menu and keep his gastronomic reactions keen. (How can you judge America's food if you have it every day?) He would also be provided with a bodyguard of trained and polite gunmen, so that he could keep his mind exclusively on his job and have no worry about what was coming to him round the corner, no matter how terrifying the newspapers might be. . . . Ulysses would be a good name for him.

Thus armed, and cared for, he would proceed, year after year, from large cities to small ones, and from those to hick-towns, collecting immense material for an opus that would do credit to the theme, which in Vol. I would take him, perhaps, from New York as far as Chicago. . . . Only to be haunted all the way by the disturbing suspicion that the more the names of towns and cities change, the more they (the towns and cities) remain the same.

That, perhaps, would prove in the end to be the chief difficulty of it all. The climate of New York may not be the climate of San Diego, but a hot-dog stand in Arizona looks precisely like one in Massachusetts. I have even heard it said that the hot-dogs themselves are much the same all over the country, and that only a very few experts—men whose perceptions are, so to speak, trained to the millimetre—can tell the difference between one born in the North and one who first saw the light below the Mason and Dixon line.

It is magnificent in its way, but it is a little too standardised for romance. In England there is, even in this respect, much more variety. Only one county, Cambridgeshire, is

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

famous for its sausages. Only one county, Devonshire, can produce clotted cream. Essex has its oysters, Yorkshire its pudding, Worcestershire its sauce, Cornwall its pasties, Wiltshire its bacon, and Aberdeen its jokes. All this helps to make life different, in different places.

For some considerable period I travelled through the United States in the company of an English baronet. This gentleman, otherwise unimpeachable, discovered in himself an extraordinary passion for American ice-cream. Scorning all questions of rank, he would sit down anywhere to eat it.

"This is a wonderful country," he said to me, often. "Their ice-cream is magnificent—positively magnificent. I do wish you would try some, my dear fellow."

He is an eloquent man, and he would make this simple utterance with all that fervour with which other after-dinner speakers would say that what these two great nations most needed was to know each other better, because to know each other better was—er—to become more closely acquainted, and therefore to understand each other more. He saw all the great American panorama through his love for what he maintained was the best ice-cream in the world. He refused to believe the crime statistics. He maintained stoutly that no people which could produce ice-cream such as this would just go about shooting each other. I saw him eating it in hotel cafés in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and elsewhere. While I ached for bottled beer and other such impossible delights, he was happy with a spoon. Member of a family which has helped to build up the British Empire, he left America behind him with the keenest regret, because it had given him the best ice-cream of all his varied experience. What he is doing about it in London, Heaven only knows. He must be very miserable.

But I can imagine him saying in the imposing clubs to which he belongs : "A marvellous country, my dear fellow,

ENVOI

marvellous. I had a splendid time there. We have much to learn from them."

It is certain that in those haunts of British prejudice he will not dare to confess that the aspect of life that made him happiest of all in the United States was its superb ice-cream, unfailingly good in every state and city of the Union. No man who is surrounded by purple generals and distinguished pro-consuls would dare to do that. It would be too much to expect. But he will certainly be for all time an eloquent partisan of all things American. He will say (to himself): "I care not who drinks her bootleg liquor, so long as I may partake of her ice-cream." It is amazing what small affairs will turn a man's mind to benevolent opinions.

And indeed I met with many evidences of this sort of thing in America. A very amiable Californian told me, with his charming wife to corroborate, about his happy discovery of England. It really all hung on a cup of tea.

With his wife he went through Italy and France. There was a heat wave in Italy, and he felt very ill. Things were little better in France. He was still ill. He couldn't eat. Paris bored them. (One of my most extraordinary discoveries, by the way, was the large number of Americans who prefer London to Paris, showing that masculinity still survives in the United States, despite all that the dear women are doing.) They landed at Dover.

"I felt a new man at once," he said, quite in the style of a testimonial. "They brought me a lovely cup of tea and some cakes in the Pullman. It was the first thing I had relished for weeks. I felt alive again. Everybody spoke English. It was like coming home." They rattled him through Kent, dropped him in London, and he was so happy he didn't want to leave it. He will always love England now. I should like some day to introduce him to my baronet, and hear them discuss Anglo-American relations:

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

"I quite agree" (my baronet would say). "There should be no possible room for political differences between two countries whose language, laws, history, traditions, indeed, whose very prejudices, come from a common stock; whose aspirations reach forward to a common ideal. . . . And, by Jove! you people really do make the most superb ice-cream!"

But then of course different people do have such very different points of view. During my travels in America many of my most interesting conversations seem to have been with barbers. One such was cutting my hair somewhere in California. We were surrounded by that shining white and sanitary luxury which is one of the highest expressions of American civilisation; which makes one think of the average London barber's shop as a sort of mediæval cavern, charming enough in its way, with a creaking sign outside. I was reading the *Christian Science Monitor*.

"Are you a Scientist, sir?" this barber asked cordially.

I confessed that I wasn't, and he told me proudly that he was. He proved to be a very earnest sort of fellow; explained that he could have retired long ago, but preferred to go on working, which is something that I never could understand. And he mentioned that he had been to London.

"A very fine city. I enjoyed it very much. But how I wish you could dispose of your drink problem as we have done with ours!"

I sat up at this.

"Our drink problem!"

"Yes. Your public-houses. It made me feel sad to see them everywhere. People crowding into them, wasting their money on drink."

He was really quite upset about it, in the kindest way. He had been to London, and the memory of its public-houses hurt him. And I was away from London, and

ENVOI

through a few months absence had come to see the London public-house, with all its faults, as a very pleasant sort of place to have about. I thought of the cosy interiors of some of them; of the rich store of delight in bottles and casks openly displayed; of the crisp tang of Bass or Worthington, as contrasted with the cloying sweetness of even the best ice-cream; of gin which:

“Whatever the faults of gin may be,
Is as pure as gin knows how to be.”

And here was this dear fellow worried about our liquor problem! So was I. The problem with me being that it was such a very long way off.

Dear, dear. Must we, then, in any discussion or description of the United States, get back to that well-worn theme? I am afraid that like 'The King Charles's Head'—which is a sign that may be seen swinging here and there in England—it is bound to crop up. But my objection to American liquor legislation was not so much what it did to my drinking, as what it did to my eating. One may do without the *apéritif*. But what about the wine? In the land where cocktails first flourished, one could forswear them if only when the fish or the joint appeared there appeared in their company just what should be there: the chaste white wine or the ruby red; or the rich brown of English beer or, to go farther and not necessarily fare worse, the pale amber of German lager. But anyhow, something—something for the love of all the good cheer that the world has ever known. The tang of dry alcohol, and not the sweetness of sweets. And not, oh dear, no, not creamy coffee in a large cup!

Fortunate America, with its prosperity and its millionaires. Stupendous America, with its rocketing skyscrapers. . . . But in Europe we manage to rub along. On my first night back in London I walked into a modest French restaurant. Yet it was a place of high adventure. For one

THE AMERICAN ILLUSION

·dollar did I purchase a bottle of very worthy Chablis. And as I drank my share of it I thought of all the hotel dinners I had eaten, in the East, the Middle, and the West, where its magic presence would have transformed the scene, where its inexpensive but precious aid would have changed a mere meal into a feast. And my heart went out in sympathy to all those nice rich Americans who, sitting amid scenes of architectural splendour, must drink coffee with their dinner.

THE END